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In this issue

EDITORIAL

The Vicious Circle of Radicalism

On persecution of historical publications in Belarus

By Zachar Šybieka

Recent events about the historical publication *Arche*, and also about *Hrodnaznaŭstva*, actually reflect the fight between two views - what kind of country should Belarus be ? Intellectuals, clustered in non-governmental civic structures, present a European Belarus, while the head of state and his entourage see Belarus as a Eurasian country. They are resisting the European trend by all means. True, they are not destroying it physically, as in Stalin's time. However, they are severely limiting its appeal, by using it in a political game with the West. Whenever the European orientation gains in strength and dangerously influences the society, repressions begin. The Europeanness is being again driven into the boundaries of an assigned "Bantustan."

The journal *Arche* became extraordinarily popular, to a significant degree thanks to its editor Valerka Bulhakaŭ, who demonstrates both scholarly and commercial abilities. The publishing section of the magazine has filled Belarus' book market with interesting works by foreign authors. The book *Hrodnaznaŭstva* (a popular scholarly outline of Horadnia's past) has also produced a significant civic response. An intellectual center has been formed in Horadnia, which, along with *Arche* very actively propagates ideas of a European Belarus. It was not by accident that the attack on Valerka Bulhakau began in Horadnia.

The journal Arche is the only scholarly-popular publication alternative to the equally solitary official *Belarusian Historical Periodical* , that is printing articles and advice to teachers on how history should be taught correctly . *Arche's* online version is not going to replace the printed paper version. Internet is more difficult to use, and has, in comparison with the book, a smaller circle of readers. *Arche* is read by more mature people, who are thus shedding Soviet stereotypes. It is read by students who find in it a different history of their country, nonexistent in their textbooks. Therefore closing the journal *Arche* and its publishing house will cause great harm primarily to the general enlightenment and to spreading historical knowledge in Belarus. The authorities are very careful concerning historical scholarly-popular publications that are gaining wide popularity. They are less worried by academic works. The scholarly journal *Belarusian Historical Review* (edited by Hienadź Sahanovič) is still holding on.

The situation in today's Belarus increasingly resembles the pre-war circumstances in Western Belarus, then a part of Poland. At the end of the 1930s, as a result of stronger repressions by Polish authorities, Belarusian cultural activists were able to preserve only a few academic publications, less accessible to the wider readership.

Yet, is it possible that this may also happen with the European trend in the Republic of Belarus, if it's reduced to academia? I don't think so. The ideals of European Belarus are increasingly spreading throughout the society. Western markets and investment sources are increasingly needed for the entrepreneurs. The isolation of the post-Soviet bureaucratic elite is becoming more pronounced. Due to the temporary strengthening of Russian influence it is only likely that boundaries of the European "Bantustan" in Belarus will shrink.

The events surrounding Belarusian publications once again have stressed Belarus' age-old problem well illustrated by the philosopher Ihnat Abdziralovic in his work *Adviečnym Šliacham* (The Age-old Road), and the poet Janka Kupala in his play *Tutejšyja* (The Locals). After the collapse of the Russian empire and the creation of the Soviet Union Belarus became a field of struggle between Soviet Russia and Poland for domination of this region.

A similar situation has remained until now. Today's Russia does not hide its intention to control Belarus. Poland does not want to border Russia , and therefore supports the project of an independent, European Belarus. It is not by accident that official Minsk considers Poland the main obstacle on the path of transforming Belarus into an Eurasian state on the Soviet model.

Soon it will be a century that the struggle between Russia and Poland for Belarus continues without a pause. As before, this divides the Belarusian society into supporters of the West and supporters of the East. When the head of state and official propagandists speak about an independent Slavic Belarus, their opponents understand it as orientation toward Russia, which presents a threat to the independence of the Belarusian state. When Belarusian intellectuals speak about an independent European Belarus, their opponents understand it as orientation toward Poland, again threatening to break off and occupy Western Belarus. Stereotypes of the past are difficult to overcome.

In our particular case it is thought that behind *Arche* and the Horadnia center there stands Poland, and behind Belarus' head of state - Russia.

Where then do we find an exit from this vicious circle? In my opinion, it lies in acquiring patience and wisdom. One cannot imagine Belarus as only European or only Slavic. It is a nonsense to simplify, to label as primitive a country located on the crossroads of European roads. Belarus is varied, multifaceted, multiethnic, polycultural. This feature makes it specific. One cannot present an independent country as being pro-Russian or pro-Polish. It must be neutral, outside of any military blocs and alliances. It is a pity that no active politicians seriously promote the idea of a neu-

tral Belarus. Unfortunately, the appeal for an independent and neutral Belarus has not become a priority.

In the concrete case - of the attack on the magazine *Arche* and the Horadnia center, still another issue is being reflected, which divides Belarus into two irreconcilable camps. It involves the evaluation of the World War II. Intellectuals , grouped in non-governmental civic structures, adhere to the European view, while the head of state and his entourage look at the wartime past through eyes of Russian stalinists. Any attempt to spread the European view throughout society is immediately punished. Belarus' head of state reacts to it in an especially sickly manner. There exists one forbidden topic: studying the activities of Belarusians who fought Russian bolsheviks on the Nazi side. In the official historiography they are called Nazi helpers, policemen. In the postwar eastern Belarusian village the word "palicaj" (policeman) became the biggest possible insult.

As soon as the journal *Spadčyna* (Heritage) began printing materials about the so-called "palicajs " at the beginning of this century, it was immediately deprived of any governmental support, and, eventually, had to stop its activity. At that time no civic protests were observed. Now the journal *Arche* crossed the red line , and immediately began experiencing downward pressure. Yet this time a civic protest is being heard. Of course, it won't help. Authorities don't take into account the opinion of society. However, the protests testify to the de-Sovietization of Belarusian society. Young people's views concerning the various views on the war are rather calm. Nevertheless, the war continues to be exploited as an ideological barricade, dividing society.

In the " Outline of Belarus' History, 1795 - 2002" I have proposed a formula for an armistice. Inhabitants of Belarus served only as cannon fodder in the struggle between Hitler's and Stalin's tyrannies . Both the partisans and those who cooperated with Nazis , acted in the same direction. Both fought perhaps different enemies of Belarus, and thus brought nearer its independence. Yet this has in no way affected the government's policy of memories. There is a shortage of wisdom and readiness to mutually forgive.

Finally, another attack on historical publications points to the sickness of theBelarusian society - radicalism. Both authorities and their opponents would rather believe, that only their way is correct, and no other. The initiative for an armistice must come from authorities. Yet, it may be futile to expect it. Somehow one doesn't see among Belarus' leadership wise men, aristocrats of thought.

Perhaps this is a deficit common to the ruling elite of the contemporary European community.

Prof. Zachar Šybieka is a well-known Belarusian historian and frequent contributor to ***Belarusian Review***

Concept of the Issue

Is it possible to imagine a European country where a parliamentary election could be as predictable as in Belarus? One would say not. Elsewhere in Europe it is still interesting even if it is clear that the ruling party remains in power for another term. In Belarus election has been transformed into quite an ordinary and absolutely predictable event that could hardly bring any changes into the political landscape of the country. The regime neither changes the election rules, nor does it admit any drawbacks. The opposition could not reach a consensus whether to take part in the election or to boycott it; then it failed to win a single seat in the parliament. The West remains clear in its position not to recognize Belarusian elections as free and fair ; yet it has virtually no consistent strategy about what to do with Belarus.

The Belarusian election took place on 23 September, soon after parliamentary elections took place in two neighboring countries, Lithuania (14 and 28 October) and Ukraine (28 October). There the parliamentary elections intrigued a wider audience till the very last moment, while in Belarus they resembled a classical play performed over and over again for another hundred times. It we were "Lithuanian Review" or "Ukrainian Review", in this issue we would most probably focus on results of the parliamentary election. However, we are "Belarusian Review" – and the election results are not the primary topic of the current issue.

On 3 November, 2012, a document entitled "Concluding Memorandum on Measures to Safeguard the Independence of Belarus" was signed in Vilnia at the meeting of representatives of the Belarusan civic society and political opposition with the President of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR), Ivonka Survilla. This title of the document resulted from their common belief that independence of Belarus had come under increasing threat. The Memorandum provides an opportunity to develop and consolidate common strategies of the Belarusian democratic forces. One of the fundamental features of the memorandum is the confirmation of the status of the *BNR Rada* as the reserve political repository for the tradition of Belarusian independent statehood. In this issue we publish the final text of the Memorandum as well as comments of its three signatories – Ivonka Survilla, President of the BNR in Exile, Uladzimir Baradač, Head of Organising Committee the Council for National Revival, and Aliaksandr Milinkievič, Chairman of the Movement for Freedom.

To a great extent, this issue was meant to focus on the situation in and around the Belarusian academic community. This was determined both by expected and unexpected reasons. In September 2013, the series of events concerning the issue of the textbook Hrodnaznaŭstva and the journal ARCHE have stirred the Belarusian intellectual community.

"These events actually reflect the fight between two views – what kind of country should Belarus be?,"

this thesis is discussed by the well known Belarusian historian, professor **Zachar Šybieka**, in his editorial "The Vicious Circle of Radicalism: on Persecution of Historical Publications in Belarus", providing keynotes for the entire issue.

The analysis of the Belarusian authorities' policies toward the intellectuals is continued by **David R. Marples** in his text "Belarus Targets Intellectual Community".

Valer Bulhakau, the long-time editor of ARCHE, in his interview defines the role of the journal in the Belarusian intellectual space, and also describes the present situation and the future of ARCHE.

Aleś Smaliančuk, a well-known historian from the city of Hrodna, shares his thoughts about these events and the ideological precepts of Belarusian authorities.

Kirył Kaścian discusses the recent refusals to issue entry visas to Belarus for active public figures of Poland's Belarusian minority, Alena Hlahoŭskaja and Jaŭhien Vapa, within a wider perspective of Belarus' policy concerning compatriots abroad.'

On September 28-30, 2012 Lithuanian Kaunas hosted about 400 participants from various countries who gathered to take part in the Second International Congress of Belarusian Studies.

The organizers of this scholarly and civic event were the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere" and the Vitaut the Great University in Kaunas. Like last year, *Belarusian Review* was among the information partners of the Congress. Scholars from three countries, **Andrzej Tichomirow** from Belarus, **Anatoliy Kruglashov** from Ukraine, and **Miroslaw Jankowiak** from Poland, who took part in the second edition of the Congress share their impressions of the event. **Darius Staliūnas**, the author of *Making Russians. Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (2007), introduces his findings on comparison of the anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania and Belarus during the tsarist period, delivered by him during the Congress in Kaunas.

On November 15-18, 2012, New Orleans hosted the 44th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES). It included a number of panels on Belarus-related issues. **Hanna Vasilevich** reports on proceedings of these panels.The issue contains two book reviews. The book by Andrew Savchenko *Belarus – a Perpetual Borderland* (2009) is reviewed by **Kiryl Kaścian and Hanna Vasilevich**. A book by our contributing editor Leonid Smilovitsky *Jews in Turov: The History of a Shtetl in Mozyr's Polesye Region* (2008) is reviewed by a Czech historian **Milada Polišenská.**

In this issue we are also also introducing a new educational feminist journal about Belarus and the post-socialist space entitled "Women in Politics: New Approaches to the Political".

We hope you will enjoy this issue and would be happy to hear your remarks, comments and feedbacks.

Kiryl Kaścian, website editor

FEATURES

Concluding Memorandum

of Consultative Meeting of
Leaders of Belarusian Political and Civic Organizations
and the Presidentof the Rada
of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile

On Measures to Safeguard the Independence of Belarus

3rd November 2012, Vilnius

We, the undersigned representatives of political and civic organizations of Belarus, meeting on 3rd November, 2012 in Vilnius, under the aegis of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (hereinafter "BNR Rada") in Exile and acting in accord and full cooperation with the President and Governing Council of the BNR Rada in Exile:

- realizing the risks arising from the gradual loss by the state structures of the Republic of Belarus —- as they are turned into instruments for the exercise of personal power by Alexander Lukashenka — of the hallmarks of the Belarusian national statehood and their functionality as the Belarusian national sovereignty guarantor;

- convinced that the Belarusian people themselves, as the sole bearers and the principal guarantors of the sovereignty of Belarus as well as of the Belarusian people's national-cultural future, must be able freely to express their political will;

- and with a view to preserving and fully restoring the sovereignty to the Belarusian people in our national homeland as an objective that shall unite the political community in Belarus as well as Belarusians all over the world;

have agreed and hereby undertake to work together to achieve the following objectives:

(1) To restore to the people of Belarus a mechanism to enable them to make free and informed decisions about their political future, which will serve as a guarantee of Belarusian national sovereignty. To attain this end, the authoritarian regime will have to be dismantled. Measures shall be implemented at the earliest opportunity to prevent a repeat of authoritarian rule and abuse of power.

(2) To gain the broadest possible recognition by the international community that that neither Alexander Lukashenka nor the state authorities under his control possess democratic legitimacy, and cannot therefore constitute legally competent representatives to act on behalf of Belarus, in particular in matters pertaining to their entering into obl;igations under treaties and agreements thtat may limit or encumber the sovereignty of the state, or relating to the sale of state property. Such treaties, agreements and sales shall not be binding on a future democratic Belarusian state, and shall be subject to review and possible revision or annulment.

(3) To coordinate the efforts of civic and political organizations, both within Belarus and among Belarusuans living abroad. This coordination has a vital role to play, both in countering official propaganda that aims to destroy Belarusian national awareness, and in increasing the understanding within Belarusian society of the importance of the existence of a sovereign national Belarusian state.

(4) To strengthen coordinated pressure from the political community and civil society in Belarus and from outside in order to achieve a reduction of fear within the society of Belarus: first and foremost to secure the release and rehabilitation of political prisoners, an end to political repressions, dismantling of the machinery of repression, freedom for the mass media, and finally the holding of free elections. Fulfillment of these conditions will enable Belarus to emerge from a state of international self-isolation; it will open up opportunities for the growth of prosperity and the reinforcement of the sovereignty of Belarus through proper engagement in the system of international relations.

(5) To seek guarantees from the countries of the European Union, the United States of America and the Russian Federation; for the inviolability of Belarusian national sovereignty, for non-recognition of the international legal force endangering the the sovereign status of Belarus, which have already been made or could be made in the future on its behalf by the authoritarian state authorities, as well as for the denial of legitimacy with respects and privileges detrimental to Belarus' sovereignty which may be claimed or demanded from Belarus by the Russian Federation on the basis of the "zone of special interests' doctrine.

(6) To draw up an agreed upon joint package of top-priority political, economic and legal measures designed to safeguard Belarusian sovereignty from the risks that may arise during the period of crisis and transition following the collapse of the authoritarian regime. These measures shall include the areas of energy and food supply, cultural and information policy, administrative governability during the period of transition to democracy, and the fight against corruption and organized crime. The parties to this agreement shall strive to gain the maximum possible international support for securing these objectives.

(7) The undersigned representatives from civil and political organizations in Belarus hereby confirm their recognition of the BNR *Rada* as per its Statute, as a non-partisan institution of Belarusian historical statehood that is above politics. They shall seek to co-ordinate their endeavors for achieving the common objectives listed above with the BNR *Rada* and wil be able to count on its assistance and support whenever necessary. They will assist the BNR *Rada* in activities aimed at the fulfillment of its historical mandate.

(8) The undersigned representatives from civil and political organizations in Belarus further recognize the BNR *Rada* as the reserve political repository for the tradition of Belarusian independent statehood, until such time as conditions permit the BNR *Rada* to relinquish its historical mandate as specified in its Statute, i.e. the election of a democratic state authority in free elections with a guarantee of state independence. The President and members of the BNR *Rada*'s Governing Council hereby affirm the commitment of the *Rada* to the fulfillment of its statutory mandate. Until its manadate is fulfilled, the BNR *Rada* may also perform other functions, to which it may be properly called by the Belarusian political community and society.

The Belarusian political and civic organizations here represented and the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile intend to work towards ensuring the co-ordination of the political and information activities of all Belarusian communities throughout the world, as well as to encourage appropriate linking of the resources of their organizations and institutions at all levels, within Belarus as well as with foreign contacts, for the implementation of such joint and/or co-ordinated measures aimed at safeguarding national independence in the conditions of the authoritarian regime's self-isolation, crisis and eventual dismantlement in Belarus.

[Signatories from the organizations, in the alphabetic order, as of the time of signing in Vilnius on the 3rd November 2012:]

Uladzimier Baradac , "Council for National Revival" Organizing Committee
Alexander Dabravolski, "United Civic Party"
Mikalaj Dziemidzienka, "Young Front"
Aliaksiej Janukievic, " BPF Party"
Volha Karac, Civic Campaign "Our Home"
Uladzimier Kolas, "Council (*Rada*) of Belarusian Intelligentsia"
Aliaksandr Milinkievic, The "Movement for Freedom"
Stanislau Shushkievic, "Belarusian Social-Democratic *Hramada* Party"
Vincuk Viacorka, "Belarusan *Ruch*"

[Signatories from the organizations, in the alphabetic order, joined as of the time of publication on the 12th November 2012:]

Uladzimier Niakliajeu, "Tell the Truth" campaign
Zianon Pazniak, " BPF Conservative-Christian Party"
Vital Rymaseuski, "Belarusian Christian Democracy Party" Organizing Committee)
Viacaslau Siucyk, Solidarity Movement "Together"

For the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile:

Ivonka Survilla, President of the BNR *Rada* in Exile

Texts for the BELARUSIAN REVIEW

If you would like to submit your text to *Belarusian Review* please email it to the address: thepointjournal@googlemail.com. We accept texts in Belarusian, Czech, German, English, Polish, Slovak, Sorbian, and Ukrainian. By submitting the text, the author gives his/her consent to the translation of his/her text into the official languages of our website. The Board reserves the right to place the article on the website in its original language (German, Polish, Russian, etc.) if the translation into any of the website's language versions cannot retain all the peculiarities of the original text.

About the Vilnius Memorandum

By Ivonka Survilla

As President of the Rada, I have become well acquainted with the challenges of representing a government in exile. Some of these challenges have much to do with the processes of government at the macro level: breaking through assumptions that dictate government policies and calling attention to the issues that affect Belarus, its internal realities under Lukashenka, and its external potential in relation to the EU. Part of these challenges have to do with the nature of discourse about Belarus and how the producers of such discourse lose sight of the broad implications of political process and cooperation, thereby diffusing the potential diplomatic and practical effect of democratic efforts.

Anyone who has participated in dialogues about Belarus with non-Belarusians has been made aware that Belarusians are labeled as conformists. To insiders, however, the reality is that Belarusians are proud individualists. Indeed that trait is obvious even amongst younger Belarusians. To Canadians with whom I worked in the Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus, this was the single most distinguishable feature they had observed when asked to describe the children they had hosted.

This discrepancy is perhaps due to the many years of oppression Belarusians experienced during the 19th and the 20th centuries. The individualism of Belarusians manifests itself in many different ways. While I embrace this trait in a positive light, it can take on the form of critical reactions based on the desire to "prove" rightness, instead of considering the bigger picture. This is probably a reason why it is often so hard for our democratic Opposition in Belarus, and the communities of our diaspora, to come to consensus.

Recently, however, a remarkable event generated a broad-based consensus of paramount importance for the democratic process. On the 3rd of November, 2012, most leaders of Belarusian political parties and those engaged in Belarusian civil society who could travel, accepted the invitation of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile to discuss in Vilnius the risks for the future of Belarusian independence arising from the policies of A. Lukashenka's regime. Their willingness to meet proves that there is one issue on which we all agree – the necessity to preserve at all costs the fragile independence of Belarus.

The reason why this Forum was deemed necessary at this time was our common belief that Belarusian independence had come under increasing threat because of the complete loss of democratic accountability and of the disastrous management of the national economy by A. Lukashenka. This has left Belarus critically vulnerable to the endeavours of our Eastern neighbours to consolidate their control over the sectors most vital for sustaining our sovereignty. The totality of the democratic Opposition in Belarus, with the exception of the pro-Russian Communist Party and a few smaller political entities, believe thatthere is a real risk to the future of our independence, especially when the situation reaches its breaking point.

The importance of this event is undeniable, and yet its effect on the global policy stage needs much more attention. While the internal dynamics of our political energies is important, the perception of policy makers outside of the Belarusian sphere must be addressed and in some cases redirected. We still suffer from the fact that many Western politicians find it easier to turn a blind eye rather than consistently reevaluate their positions about Belarus. One response is to be blatantly dismissive. By extension, any true evaluation of the threat to Belarusian independence arising from the colonialist policies of a neighbouring State is simply ignored.

Our Belarusian reality is not only shaped by the detrimental effects of the policies of the present regime, complicated by the support of Russia, but it is also dependent upon our ability to support and, when appropriate, applaud the efforts of our political actors. Not to do so is to simply perpetuate the misconceptions about our country, about those poised to support change, and about the bigger picture - a free and democratic Belarus. Every State has to face challenges at some stage in its history, but Belarus is at this time more vulnerable than most. Ignoring it for whatever abstract consideration or short-sighted critique may prove costly not only to the people of Belarus, but to the region in its entirety

Uladzimir Baradač On Vilnia Memorandum: "A Historical Step Made; Another Is Needed, not Less Important"

On November 3, 2012, in Vilnia, a unique meeting took place : the leadership of the Rada BNR met with leaders of Belarus'political parties and civic organizations.

For those who revere the history and symbols of our country, meeting such people as Ivonka Survila, Chviedar Niuńka and Stankevich brothers, Viačka (Walter) and Jurka (George), and many other selfless patriots, is to experience living examples of love for Belarus, devotion to their homeland. They inspire us to struggle for liberation from the savagery and marasmus; it is an example of our morality.

Today the Rada BNR is for Belarus a more legitimate, moral and legal structure than president Lukasenka and the parliament appointed by him. Seventy percent of Belarus' population wishes for change, which is a testament to the regime's illegitimacy. Only the people and its will are legitimate. However, one has to take into account that normal and legal aspects are not functioning in the country; arbitrariness and violence prevail here. Lawlessness predominates here over the law.

To the credit of the meeting's participants an important document has been adopted; a historical step was made.

The adopted memorandum is an important declarative document . However, now it is necessary to take another

significant step. The organizing committee of the Council for National Revival proposes a mechanism for the realization of the memorandum's provisions. For this it is necessary to create a system of struggle, a structure not subordinated to special services, which would unite all patriotic forces abroad and in Belarus.. It will define the strategy and tactics of the struggle for restoring the Constitutional order in the country. It will conduct negotiations with allies and opponents. We propose to create a CENTER of the struggle: the Council of National Revival. Its individual structures will be located abroad and on Belarus' territory. All its efforts and resources will be directed to Belarus and work on its territory.

Without it we will not be able to influence processes now taking place in our country. What we have now, is not an opposition; it consists of sects managed by the KGB, fighting each other for grants and survival. It is a way to cohabitate with the regime.

Milinkievič Comments On Vilnia Memorandum

The Vilnia meeting was initiated by the BNR Rada, the holder of the statehood tradition and of moral values for the absolute majority of our democratic community.

It is very important that almost all leaders of the political opposition have signed the Memorandum. We realize that Belarus' authorities, through their policies have put the country's independence under a serious threat from Russia. We see that the Kremlin's policy aims at achieving full control over the economy and policies of Belarus.

And we do underline our determined position in the matter of our country's sovereignty and measures undertaken for its defense.

I believe that by its timely initiative the BNR Rada has demonstrated its great potential in consolidating Belarusian democratic forces. We must continue the process of unification and develop common actions on the basis of non-partisan and responsible defense of our most important national interest.

New on The_Point Journal website:

David Erkomaishvili. Misha's Dream: Do Georgian Elections Really Change It All?

The newly elected Georgian parliament convened for its first session on 21 October. Thus, the majority in the parliament that was won by the Georgian Dream coalition, led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, has been legitimised into power. A transition period is now beginning, and it will last until 2013, when constitutional amendments that cede most of the presidential powers to the prime minister will enter into force. At that time, incumbent president Mikheil Saakashvili will step down, having served two terms in office. This transition promises to be complicated.

BELARUS' FORUM

Belarus Targets Intellectual Community

By David Marples

On November 5, the Russian company ROSSPEN published the memoirs of former chairman of the Parliament Stanislau Shushkevich, the first leader of Belarus after independence. The book came out in a Russian-language edition because none of Belarus's publishers dared to issue the original in Belarusian. According to Shushkevich, they received a warning that if they did so, it would be the last book they published (Euroradio for Belarus, November 2).

The event symbolizes the current crisis of intellectual life in Belarus and the near monopoly the government wields over publications, especially about the recent (Soviet) past. Over the past few weeks, Belarusians have witnessed a rather unusual contrast. On October 16, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka featured on the Russian RT network to give his views on Soviet history. He declared that figures like Lenin and Stalin "should not be demonized. They were our leaders," noting that Lenin created the Soviet state and Stalin "strengthened it." Europeans, he stated (with withering disregard for German historians), "do not criticize their own history. So why are we not allowed to be proud that we had a Soviet empire?" (RT, October 16)

. Two weeks later at a meeting with activists of the United Russia Party, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev voiced a different view, observing that Stalin in effect declared war on his own people and that the repressions of that period should not be repeated. It is therefore necessary, he said, "with maximum objectivity to appraise historical events" (dp.ru, October 30).

In Belarus, the leading non-governmental intellectual magazine is ARCHE, which was established in 1998. According to its self-description, ARCHE is an independent bi-monthly magazine that covers political and academic thought and literature from Belarus and abroad and is especially popular in university circles (eurozine.com). Its editors maintain that the Belarusian special services wish to control the market for book production in order to control the minds of the readership and foster an imposed post-Soviet-Russian identity on Belarusians, nurtured by Russian colonial history. Therefore, critiques of Sovietization of Belarus under the USSR represent challenges to the current regime, which has maintained and promoted the myths and glorification of the Soviet past (arche.by, November 3).

On September 14, the editor-in-chief of ARCHE, Valer Bulhakau, was in Hrodna to launch a new book published by the editorial board and authored by Yan Shumski entitled, "The Sovietization of Western Belarus." The book was one of a series on this same topic. Tax inspection officials from Hrodna Regional Council stopped the presentation,

accusing Bulhakau of "illegal entrepreneurship" for not having invoices for all the books in his possession. The officials confiscated 194 copies. Subsequently the Hrodna Economic Court fined him 500,000 Belarusian rubles ($58) and also seized monies received for copies sold—an estimated 875,000 Belarusian rubles ($100). The fines seem like token amounts by Western standards, but ARCHE faces a struggle to survive. Bulhakau resigned as editor-in-chief in order to keep his personal plight from affecting the magazine. The state also seized 20 different titles published by the magazine, claiming that they offered a distorted interpretation of Belarusian history during the World War II Nazi occupation. In fact, only two of these confiscated books focused on the war, discussing the question of whether Stalin had planned to attack Nazi Germany in 1941. Other titles taken from Bulhakau included books on medieval Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Battle of Grunwald (1410), and the formation of the Belarusian National Republic in 1918 (Nasha Niva, October 31).

After the confiscation of ARCHE's literature, the authorities began to audit the magazine, in order, in its own words, "to dig up dirt" that would allow the filing of a criminal case. The Hrodna episode is the fourth time the regime has targeted the magazine, but evidently it is the most severe attack to date (arche.by, November 3). Along the same vein, in September, the Hrodna State University dismissed historian Andrei Charniakevich for "harsh violations of work discipline," but evidently the real reason was that he published a book on the history of Belarus that ended prior to the emergence of Lukashenka as president (ehu.lt, October 12). On October 8, a Belarusian-speaking professor at the same institution's law faculty was also pressured to sign a "voluntary resignation agreement" after he authored some children's fairy tales that featured the Pahonia, the official coat of arms of the Belarusian National Republic of 1918, as well as the white-red-white flag used at that time—also associated with the 1991–1995 emblem banned in Belarus after a state referendum in May 1995 (charter97.org, October 8).

In short, therefore, a plethora of topics are now taboo for Belarusian academics and intellectuals. Moreover, the situation has worsened considerably in recent months. In 2008, for example, customs officials targeted Alies Pashkievich (then deputy editor and now editor-in-chief of ARCHE), confiscating books on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as well as some that featured current Belarusian politicians. Yet, after ARCHE appealed, the Belarusian KGB backed down and the books were returned (Nasha Niva, October 31). Two years later, historian Illya Kopyl published a series of articles in the Belarusian language about wartime partisans in the village of Niabyshyna (Viciebsk Region), Belarus, in the newspaper Narodnaya Volya. The authorities issued an official warning to the newspaper, which was picketed by alleged veterans, some of whom seemed too young to have been in the war, as well as by the Union of Patriotic Youth, a pro-Lukashenka organization that occupies the headquarters of the former Komsomol (charter97.org, Jun 2, 2010). As these examples indicate, the Lukashenka regime is extremely sensitive about the historical past. It has fostered a single interpretation of the Soviet years that not only continues the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, but also manifestly ignores the Stalinist repressions, including the NKVD massacre of prisoners at Kurapaty on the outskirts of Minsk, where mass graves were uncovered in the late 1980s. Monuments erected there are regularly violated. Most recently, a memorial sign initiated by historian Ihar Kuzniatsou to recognize the Polish army officers executed at Kurapaty during WWII has disappeared (charter97.org, October 31). Some 25 kilometers to the northwest, one can find a bust of Stalin adorned with wreaths at the entrance to the Stalin Line Museum, founded in 2005 by the Afghan Veterans Association and visited regularly by Lukashenka. The Museum, based on a myth of a fortified line that delayed the German attack on Moscow, corresponds to the official version of the Soviet past.

The Lukashenka presidency has defined the modern state based on Soviet myths and respect—if not glorification—for the "achievements" of Stalin as a ruler. Lukashenka perceives himself as a strong leader continuing past traditions. His regime, therefore, targets any individual, newspaper, journal, or magazine that questions the official perspective for the crime of "historical revisionism." Bulhakau is the latest victim

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Valer Bulhakaŭ: ARCHE is a Place For Self-realization, Self-expression

The journal ARCHE is a noted phenomenon in the Belarusian intellectual space. The series of events around the journal and its editor Valer Bulhakaŭ that began in Hrodna on 14th of September during the presentation of the book by the historian Jan Šumski "Sovietization of Western Belarus," have produced considerable uproar in society. ***Belarusian Review*** *has asked Valer Bulhakaŭ himself to define the role of ARCHE in the Belarusian intellectual space, and also to describe the present situation and the future of the journal.*

Belarusian Review (BR): *How would you characterize the niche now occupied by ARCHE in the Belarusian media and intellectual space?*

Valer Bulhakaŭ (VB) : The role of ARCHE in the Belarusian mdia is marginal. Its media effect probably corresponds to that of an average district newspaper. ARCHE is not the usual mass media device. It is a thick monthly periodical with an average printing run of 700 copies. And most importantly, it does not offer information addressed to the mass reader. Our target groups are narrower. They consist of the academic community, humanitarian intelligentsia, young students, people of Belarusian culture.

In the Belarusian intellectual space the journal's place is quite different. here its position is central: ARCHE is now the only independent monthly "thick" Belarusian-

language periodical in Belarus. During the years of its publication the journal welcomed hundreds of authors who made their contributions to the Belarusian culture. The Belarusian society has learned about Vital Silicki and Andrej Kazakievič from their publications on the pages of ARCHE, which gave new life to their professional careers.

I would declare even more harshly: in Lukašenka's times the role of the Belarusian state in the formation of Belarusian culture has been reduced to a minimum: in its censored form it exists in the severely regimented education system; its Soviet-style, colonial projections are being planted by the mass media. Everything is done in order to subordinate the life of the ordinary Belarusian not to the interests of the nation, but to those of the state, and those individuals who personify it.

In such circumstances the role of independent creative centers, as is and has been ARCHE, is growing. Moreover, in some areas they can even compete with the state: in circulation of publications, or, in the case of mass media, in the range of audience they reach.

BR: *How do the selection of topics, vision and concept of ARCHE differ from those of other Belarusian independent and state journals?*

VB : ARCHE is foremost a place for self-realization and self-expression. We have no strict conceptual framework, that would dictate to us, to publish, for instance, fiction, and not historiography. This is exactly what makes ARCHE different from other Belarusian journals: interdisciplinarity , which has transformed itself into the leading principle of our editorial policy.



Valer Bulhakau

Compared with other independent journals ARCHE stands out for its regular monthly appearance. This is a tiny fact per se, yet it is based on great and intense work.

BR: *The Belarusian authorities have attempted to "solve the ARCHE problem" before. How would you characterize the journal's relations with the state earlier? Precisely of what are authorities accusing the journal, and you personally, this time ?*

VB : The relations of ARCHE were problematic from the very beginning of our publication. As early as 2001, after a phone call from the Ministry of Information, it was officially forbidden to print the journal in the largest Belarusian printing house —"Belsajuzdruk" (Belarusian House of Print.) However, they tolerated us another decade.

One should mention that we dared ourselves. On the other hand, our skirmishes with the state made us stronger...

Today the authorities have no formal grievances against the journal ARCHE itself. Grievances do exist against its publisher — the institution "Editors of the journal Arche-the beginning". On the 3rd of October 2012, the Financial investigation department of the State Control Committee froze its bank account based on the fact that the publisher had not presented all requested financial records in time. And even after the editors have presented all the records from the last three years of activities, the account remains blocked.

In parallel fashion grievances have been presented against me personally; here we are dealing with articles of the criminal code. The Belarusian TV began speaking about our publication's promoting extremism, and also hinted that foreign aid has been illegally used for their printing. One doesn't have to add that in any country this is considered a crime. Moreover, there exist concerns that I might also be accused of purely economic crimes.

BR: *In your opinion, why have authorities decided to go that far today?*

VB : I have no exact answer to this question. However, the current attacks leave no doubt that ARCHE publications began to threaten Belarus' state security, as understood by Lukasenka's regime.

BR: *How do you see the journal's nearest future ?*

VB : I hope that the current crisis will only strengthen our editorial staff and our authors. Only time will tell, what the concrete face of the renewed ARCHE will be.

Aleś Smaliančuk: Popularity of "Hrodnaznaŭstva" Unveiled the Pitiful Nature Of the City's Administration

*Recent events in the issue of the textbook **Hrodnaznaustva** and the publication **ARCHE** have stirred the Belarusian intellectual community. Dr. Aleś Smaliančuk, a well-known historian from the city of Hrodna, in his blitz-interview for The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review shares his thoughts about these events, and also about the ideological precepts used by the present Belarusian authorities.*

The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review: ***In your opinion, what was the cause of Hrodnaznaŭstva's so-called revolt?***

Aleś Smaliančuk: The main reason was that the book generated enormous interest in Hrodna's population, despite the fact that official structures had nothing to do with it. Its publication began on civic beginnings, by the "Library of Hrodna." The attempt to generate "ideological sedition" was a secondary phenomenon. Considering its contents, the book was no "revolutionary" publication. Its success clearly unveiled the pitiful nature of the views displayed by the city's administrative and academic structures. Their response was a plain act of revenge with the KGB's assistance.

T_P/BR: ***Why has the Hrodna historical school recently attracted such close attention by the state?***

AS: For me personally, the term Hrodna historical school is unacceptable. As a matter of fact, there are several historians

in Hrodna, who are trying to combine professionalism with an active civic stance. Yet in the historical education of Hrodna's residents they do not dominate; most prevalent are those oriented on the ideological demands of the state, and they instruct many students, for instance in the history department of Hrodna University. And the enmity of the city administration on various levels is again conditioned both by the scholarly successes of the independent Hrodna center, and by its aspiration to spread the image of the Hrodna resident as a free and brave person.

T_P/BR: ***Why precisely now have the Belarusian authorities begun attacking the magazine ARCHE, and may this be regarded as continuation of the Hrodnaznaŭstva affair?***

AS: It is quite possible that the Hrodnaznaŭstva affair have pushed the Belarusian KGB to a more active performance throughout the country. It is not by accident that repressions against ARCHE began in Hrodna...

T_P/BR: ***Why does the monopoly of describing the events of World War II have special significance for current Belarusian authorities?***

AS: Victory in the war with Germany has played a very important role in the Communist propaganda of the Soviet period. This victory of the Soviet Union's people, treated as as a victory of the Communist Party and its leaders, has helped to conceal and justify all the failures and crimes of the Communist regime. Precisely in connection with this , Vasiľ Bykaŭ once wrote about the "stolen victory"...

It plays the same role in the ideology of current Belarusian authorities. Ideologically, they present themselves as continuing the "great cause of Lenin and Stalin." Actually, frequent appeals of these authorities and their ideological lackeys to problems of the last war create the impression, that the war is not over for them. And they are trying to convince all of Belarus of that.

Belarusian Minority in Poland: What Kind does Official Minsk need?

By Kiryl Kaścian

The recent refusals to issue entry visas to Belarus to active public figures of Poland's Belarusian minority - Aliena Hlahoŭskaja and Jaŭhien Vapa - are of a seemingly trivial significance, since every country has the right to independently decide, who may enter its territory. However, in the broader context the policies of Belarusian authorities concerning the compatriots abroad, and the situation of the Belarusian minority in Polnd, these refusals are of essential importance.

First to have been refused the entry visa was the well-known historian **Dr. Aliena Hlahoŭskaja (**Polish**:** *Helena Głogowska***)**, who, in addition to her scholarly work in Belarus-related research, heads the Belarusian culture society "Chatka" in Gdansk. This society stages Belarusian concerts, literary meetings, art exhibitions, and cares about preserving the Belarusian national memory in Poland. Dr. Hlahoŭskaja was supposed to participate in the international conference "People of Ancient Horadnia, " held by the Society for the Belarusian School during the annual observation of the Days of St. Hubert, the patron of Hrodna. Hlahoŭskaja was expected to deliver a presentation on Alexandra Bergman. This native of Hrodna and an activist of the Communist Party of Western Belarus was the first researcher of Belarusian history in post-war Poland and author of a book about Branislaŭ Taraškievič and Belarusian issues in Poland between world wars. In addition to attending the conference, Hlahoŭskaja wanted to visit the graves of her relatives, buried on the Belarusian side of the border. The Belarusian consulate considered these reasons insufficient, and on the 25th of October HlahoΔskaja was denied an entry visa to Belarus.

The situation with Dr. Hlahoŭskaja appears to indicate a changed policy of Belarusian authorities in the matter of conditions for development of history studies in the country. Ms. Hlahoŭskaja stressed that until now she had never been denied a visa for attending conferences in Belarus; the last time she was issued a visa was in June of this year, on an invitation by the Janka Kupala Museum. Hlahoŭskaja says: " We all know the attitude of today's Belarus toward history. I have been engaged for many years in discovering unknown pages of Belarus' history. Evidently, however, nobody needs them." It's difficult not to agree with her, especially since Hlahoŭskaja is a person engaged exclusively in scholarship and hasn't been involved in any direct or indirect political activity. In this case, the topic of her expected presentation, on the biography of Alexandra Bergman, , is not likely to create any conflict with the positions of the official Belarusian historical scholarship. Therefore the denial of entry visa for Hlahoŭskaja may be perceived as a continuation of the authorities' offensive against the independent historical research in Belarus, manifested in earlier events around "Hrodnaznaŭstva" and ARCHE. In this case, however, the situation goes beyond Belarus' boundaries, and directly concerns Belarus' policy toward fellow countrymen abroad - more concretely , toward the Belarusian minority in Poland.

Soon the story with Hlahoŭskaja was repeated with **Jaŭhien Vapa (**Polish**:** *Eugeniusz Wappa***)**, the administrative director of Radio Racja, and chairman of the Belarusian Alliance in Poland. On the 20th of November the same consulate in Bialystok denied Mr. Vapa a multiple- entry visa to Belarus. As a member of the Consultative Council on Belarusians abroad with Belarus' Ministry of Culture, he had been invited by the World Alliance of Belarusians "Baćkaŭščyna," as a member of its Great Council (Dr. Hlahoŭskaja is also a member). The situation with Mr. Vapa involves a number of circumstances, worth mentioning.

First: on 23rd of May, 2011, Belarusian border services annulled Mr. Vapa's valid Belarusian visa and barred him from travelling to Belarus. From that time until the visa denial for Ms. Hlahoŭskaja there were no other such cases involving representatives of the Belarusian minority in Poland.

Second: in the time between the visa denial in May 2011 and presenting necessary documents for obtaining a new

visa - which was eventually denied - "Baćkaŭščyna,"has attempted to learn the reasons for this decision by Belarusian authorities. It also persuaded Mr. Vapa to write concurrently to the Belarus' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and request a review of this decision. At the same time, "Baćkaŭščyna," has pointed out the necessity of maintaining regular relations between Belarus and the Belarusian minority in Poland.

Third: when commenting on the case of visa denial, Mr. Vapa has pointed out, that: " denying a visa to Belarus clearly indicates, that Belarusians outside of borders of their spiritual homeland , are not supposed to have views differing from those of the authorities, which now have all levers at their disposal. ." Due to the authorities' actions, the completely natural desire of Belarusians abroad to participate in the discourse about the country's development, is becoming a reason for a split within the Belarusian minority in Poland. In other words, it appears that Belarusian authorities are less interested in achievements and problems of countrymen abroad, than in their loyalty to the official Minsk.

The situation with Vapa and Hlahoŭskaja only confirms the thesis, that, in the case of the Belarusian minority in Poland, the above described division into "ours" and "foreign " becomes especially topical. On the 26th of March 2012 Belarus' president Aliaksandar Lukašenka has congratulated Jan Syčeŭski, the chairman of the Belarusian Civic-cultural Society in Poland (BHKT) on occasion of his 75th anniversary. In his message Lukašenka has underscored that "the desire to be Belarusians also beyond the boundaries of their Homeland deserves our deepest respect," and he also declared that the "Republic of Belarus will do everything to have Belarusians abroad perceive the love and support of their Homeland."

Projected on Podlachia *and the Belarusian minority in Poland, this "love and support" appears to be rather defined (and limited) Jan Syčeŭski , a long-time chairman of the BHKT, the oldest active Belarusian organization in Poland, has been a frequent participant of the " All-Belarusian People's Assemblies," and - X has become known on both sides of the Belarusian-Polish border due to his declarations of support for the political course of the Belarus' present head of state - Aliaksandr Lukasenka. Evidently, as a result of such Syceuski's activities, a considerable portion of the Belarusian community in Poland does not wish to have anything in common with him .

Let us note another circumstance: in the presently active Polish Government's Commission on national and ethnic minorities, created on the basis of the Polish law " On national and ethnic minorities, and regional languages," the Belarusian representation consists of two persons: Jaŭhien Vapa (Belarusian Alliance in Poland), and Jan Syčeŭski (BHKT), which reflects the possible pluralism of views of the Belarusian community in Poland. Yet, one does not see this pluralistic approach in actions of the official Minsk. The division into "ours" and "foreign" Belarusians in Poland is evident in the absence of information about any organizations other than BHKT (except the Museum and Belarusian Culture Center in Hajnaŭka), in the section "Fellow Countrymen" (Compatriots) on the web-site of the Offfice of the Commissioner for Religious and Ethnic Affairs with the Republic's of Belarus Council of Ministers.

Thus, this selective attitude of the Belarusian authorities toward Belarusian organizations in Poland hardly testifies to the "all-encompassing love and support of the Homeland," declared by authorities. The current situation of this minority community has been recently correctly described by Mr. Jan Maksymiuk as a "demographic catastrophe." As a result, the described division into "ours" and "foreign", is not only resulting in a split , but is also hindering any effective moral help by the metropolis - Belarus for the Belarusian ethnic community in Poland; this community is again being left alone to fight its problems.

*(**Editor's note:** Podlachia is the region of Eastern Poland, adjacent to Belarus. It is a home for the autochtonous Belarusian minority in Poland. In more than ten municipalities (Polish: *gmina*) of the region Belarusians constitute the ethnic majority or sizable minority.

BELARUS ABROAD

The Second International Congress Of Belarusian Studies

By Andrzej Tichomirow

The Second International Congress of Belarusian Studies was held in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas on 28-30 September 2012. The primary organizers of this scholarly and civic event were the Institute of political research "Political Sphere" and the Vitaut the Great University in Kaunas. as well as a number of other scholarly and civic associations and informal scholarly communities.

The First congress, held last year, was a very interesting place for exchanging ideas and experience among various researchers in the humanities engaged in Belarusian problems. This year the Vitaut the Great university has published the first volume of short theses of lectures delivered at the First congress. The Second congress was a considerably larger enterprise, especially in the number of participants (about four hundred), as well as in the number and variety of sections - twenty, compared with eight in 2011. One should note the practically faultless work by the organizers, who managed to coordinate such a large number of participants and promote productive discussion on various issues in the humanities and social sciences .

It's worthwhile to note the geographic range of participants who came from many European countries (Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, France, Finland, Belgium, Great Britain, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden), as well as from Japan, Canada, and the USA. This indicates clearly the interest of foreign researchers in Belarusian problems; it is understandable that, in many respects the

interest of Western European or North American scholarly communities in Belarus is weaker than their interest in the Near East problems or other post-Soviet states (for instance, Ukraine). In some sections the representatives of foreign countries (including emigres from Belarus) outnumbered those from Belarus itself, as was the case in the section on the Belarusian literature.

It's rather difficult to describe equally well the work of all sections of the Second congress. In comparison with the First congress, when discussions between politologues and researchers of social processes were most significant, the Second congress was much wider in the range of topics. Four large sections were devoted to history (two to the history of the Grand Duchy of Litva, and two to the history of the 19th and 20th centuries.). Separate sections dealt with problems of contemporary Belarusian culture, Belarusian cinemato graphy and literature; three other sections dealt with problems of religion: the Belarusian Bible and its translations, the theological thoughts. Three special sections treated the problems of political science: institutes of Belarusian politics(1990 - 2012), Belarus in the system of bilateral relations, and Belarus in the system of international relations.

Social problems were presented in sections dealing with the civic society, transformation of Belarus' economy, and the varied nature of the (post) communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Philosophical and methodological problems were analyzed very intensely in the section entitled "Social and humanitarian scholarship: transformation of research paradigms"; the section on reformation of the Belarusian education system dealt with more practical aspects.

A separate section concerned historical town-planning, which dealt not only with the past research of Belarusian towns, and the current interpretation of preserving their historical legacy; there were also lectures, stressing the comparative aspects of "urban history" in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The section on gender practices and policies in Belarus was one of the largest in the number of participants. This testifies to the growing interest in these problems, and the gradual formation of a Belarusian community of gender researchers.

The congress began on September 28 with a large plenary session, which consisted presentations by four foreign researchers. Unfortunately, the historian from Hrodna - Siarhiej Tokć -was not able to atend the congress ; other researchers also had this problem due to various reasons. This caused the "elimination" of a Belarusian-language lecture, which was strongly criticized by a significant part of the auditorium.

First to present was the Lithuanian historian **Zigmantas Kiaupa**, who discussed the problems of describing the history of the "short" 18th century. He has noted the commonality of the Belarusian and Lithuanian history during that period, and showed a panorama of primarily social history. The importance of the period of Enlightenment in our region for historians is becoming secondary. It is becoming a "forgotten century" in comparison with the extensive and varied research of the 19th-20th centuries. In the opinion of the Lithuanian researcher the Enlightenment was a distinctive period of a conscious reevaluation and the reconstruction of society on new beginnings, in comparison to the baroque period.

Second to present was the Russian historian, **Alexey Miller** - a specialist on the 19th century, historical methodology and historical policies. The researcher has noted that during the last 12 years have witnessed a distinct change of optics in the research of empires. A large number of publications have appeared on the topics of nation-building and comparison of various empires in Europe, as well as research dealing with the USA or Japan. The Russian researcher primarily concentrated on the problems concerning the Russian empire; he also showed new methodological paradigms for studying the past. He separately underscored the role of historians' international cooperation, of widening the range of studied problems, of the significance of the last twenty years for the "historical imperiology." Alexey Miller's appearance provoked many questions and echoes, including criticism of reviving the imperial ideology. The historian remarked that the Russian empire is part of the past. One shouldn't build contemporary policies on its basis; good contemporary policies don't need history's assistance. He also called appealed to Belarusian researchers to join international cooperation in historical research , including that of problems of the 19 - 20th centuries.

Third to appear was the Polish historian **Leszek Zasztowt** - the director of the Institute of history of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Mr. Zasztowt is a well-known specialist in the field of the 19th century's education history in the Belarusian and Lithuanian lands .The main feature of the Polish historian's appearance was the problem of historical mythologization during the19th-20th centuries . As an example of such mythologization he chose the reevaluation of the city of Vilnia in the Polish civic and poli tical thinking. In the first quarter of the 19th century the concept of the Grand Duchy of Litva and even of the *Rzeczpospolita* in the Polish narrative gradually disappeared, and was replaced by the concept of "Poland," which has also led to a distinct motive of periphery, sub-ordination and secondariness in comparison with the "Crown." The lecturer has noted the appearance of the concept of *"Kresy"* and the evolution of this term and the degradation of the capital city function of Vilnia after the division of the Rzeczpospolita. In the Polish (and also Russian) thinking of the 19th century Vilnia simply became a provincial city with a rich history. The Polish historian has remarked on contemporary views on the mythologization of history, and the need to fight such a phenomenon - or conversely, to accept the existence of such mythologization and treat it as a part of our past.

The fourth appearance - by the well-known Hungarian sociologue **Pal Tamas** - has dealt with the social structure of an authoritarian regime (dictatorship). The researcher has underscored the mutual relationship between the population and the person of the dictator (or, in a broader

sense, of the oppressors). As long as such a connection exists, a corresponding system of authority remains in the given country. Also , he expressed very interesting reflections concerning the concept of the "civic society" and the Belarusian situation in the context of other Central and Eastern European states.

The proceedings of individual sections were very diverse and productive. Many participants in discussions expressed themselves very emotionally and responsibly. This was one of the positive features of the Second Congress. The opportunity to discuss freely, to present results of one's work, to exchange ideas with other researchers, and prospectively create common projects is probably the main achievement of this scholarly event. Its venue - the city of Kaunas, is another useful feature. The city has a unique atmosphere, and is a very convenient logistical base. I hope that future congresses will continue to be held in Kaunas (though, ideally, they would be held in Belarus.)

A Nascent Tradition Of Belarusian Studies

By Anatoliy Kruglashov

At the very end of September, 2012 I participated in the Second Congress of Belarusian Studies (Kaunas, Lithuania). It was the second time I was taking part in the Congress activity. It is possible now to compare the First and Second Congress and observe the fact of a new nascent tradition of convening both prominent and perspective scholars and experts from all over the world in order to discuss a variety of topics related to Belarus. Certainly, it's seems rather strange to witness that such a Forum is being organized outside of Belarus, near the Lithuanian-Belarus border. Well, there are some reasons that have determined this situation.

First of all, I had the pleasure of seeing a growing number of Congress participants, and not only in the sense of their quantity but quality of them as well. The second positive moment is that the agenda of the Second Congress has been designed to cover a lot of academic issues, starting from Belarus history and historiography, and concluding with some geopolitical and security issues of its policy and politics. Thirdly, there are many more participants from Belarus itself now, with deferent standpoints and approaches towards issues of the Congress's agenda.

Another positive aspect of the Congress activity is a promising tradition of presenting some new editions on Belarus, i.e. books, collections of articles and journals for a wider audience. Both formal and informal parts of Congress events have progressed at a good pace, being well-prepared in general.

Organizers of the Congress from Belarusian NGO's and think tanks, together with Lithuanian Colleagues from Vytautas Magnus University have tried their best in preparing for the Second Congress in Kaunas.

At the same time, some recommendations could be made concerning the approach to preparations for the next Congress. First of all, it's important to take care of making the thesis of Congress's participants available in Internet prior to its opening ceremony. Secondly, the cultural program of the Congress deserves as yet much more preparation of the organizers should they be concerned about inspiring atmosphere of professional communication amidst the international community of Belarus researchers. The latter is rather still lagging behind from being well-organized and functioning properly. Despite some remaining problems to be discussed and resolved in an orderly fashion, I am pleased to make a modest but optimistic conclusion: Belarusian Studies are growing up in Belarus and worldwide, they are gradually approaching further international academic recognition. Thus the venue of the Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas makes this progress increasingly more provable and visible.

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Miroslaw Jankowiak: Opportunity For Scholarly Development was the Greatest Value of the Congress.

The Second International Congress of Belarus Researchers in Kaunas in September 2012 attracted many noted scholars; one of them was Dr. Miroslaw Jankowiak from the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, the author of a book about contemporary dialects of the Belarusian language in Latgalia (***Editor's note:*** *in the south-eastern region of Latvia)*

Andrzej Tichomirow (AT): *Having participated for the first time in the International Congress of Belarus Researchers, what are your impressions?*

Miroslaw Jankowiak (MJ): Indeed it was the first time I had the opportunity to participate in the Congress held in Kaunas. What caught my attention at first, was its surge. Managing such a huge number of participants is logistically no simple matter; the organizers handled it very successfully. Especially since accompanying events were also taking place.

AT: *In your opinion, what was the greatest value of the Congress?*

MJ: Undoubtedly the opportunity to get acquainted with researchers from many countries and academic centers. Sometimes it seems inconceivable that someone in a different country, as exotic for our issues, as for instance, Romania, may be engaged in similar topics. This allows to get to know other points of view, than the one has been familiar with - when working in a concrete academic center. In Poland there are not many researchers of Belarus; after a few years one gets used to certain opinions or research methodologies. In Kaunas one could see something new,

confront one's research, stop to reflect on what should be studied in the future, get acquainted with interesting individuals, with whom it will be possible to conduct common projects. All this allows an even faster pace of scholarly development.

AT: *Was there anything about the Congress you didn't like?*

MJ: A certain degree of impossibility to listen to all for me interesting lectures, that were sometimes delivered on the same day and at the same time in parallel sections. However, this is the price of participating in large symposiums, when several panels are taking place in parallel.

AT: *How do you evaluate the choice of venue for the Congress*

MJ: In last years I became used to it, that events of Belarusian studies were held either in Warsaw, Bialystok, Lublin, or in Belarus. In Lithuania it always had to be Vilnius. In our consciousness Vilnius was considered to a degree a Belarusian city. Yet, Kaunas has not only an inimitable atmosphere with a wonderful architecture. It also has a fairly strong connection with Belarusian matters. It was the seat of the Ministry for Belarusian affairs with the Lithuanian government in the interwar period; Belarusian-language press was also published here. All the more, the choice of Kaunas has pleased me

AT: *How do you evaluate the work of your section*

MJ: I have delivered a lecture in the section dealing with national minorities and national identity in borderlands and with international relations. For some time now, topics concerning minorities and borderlands, for that matter extremely fascinating, have been very popular in Poland and other countries. The lectures, although dealing with varied issues, were for me enormously interesting and educational. Once more, the principle was confirmed, that in present tmes research should be conducted in a interdisciplinary fashion; one should not shut oneself in a narrow sphere of interest. Especially, since it is always possible to find a common denominator for the cooperation of historians, politologues, ethnologues or philologists.

The interview has been conducted by Andrzej Tichomirow

Darius Staliunas: Jews are now Included in General Works on Lithuanian History

Dr. Darius Staliūnas is one of the most prominent contemporary Lithuanian historians, the author of "Making Russians. Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863." Amsterdam/New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007. His research interests focus on Russian nationality policy in the Northwestern Region (Lithuania and Belarus). In his interview for *The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review* Dr. Staliūnas discusses the current situation with Jewish Studies in Belarus and Lithuania. This interview also briefly introduces some findings of Dr. Staliūnas on comparison of the anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania and Belarus during the tsarist period —to be delivered during the second International Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas.

The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review (T_P/BR): *To what extent are Jewish Studies in demand by the historical science in Lithuania and Belarus?*

Darius Staliūnas (DS): To start with, I do not feel competent enough to talk about the situation in Belarus with relation to Jewish studies, so most of my remarks deal with the situation in Lithuania. In recent years there apeared quite a few publications on Jewish history in Lithuania. The Jewish history is being taught at all major Lithuanian universities in one way or another. However, most importantly, as a rule Jews are now included in so-called general works on Lithuanian history. But at the same time this topic is very often treated as marginal to Lithuanian history, perceived as not "our" history.

T_P/BR: *How do you assess the current state of research on Jewish issues in Lithuania and Belarus (thematic, approaches, international cooperation)?*

DS: There was no place for Jews in historical narratives under the Soviet regime in Lithuania like there was in Belarus. Soviet historians had to be interested in the history of social classes and their conflicts and not in ethnic (or national) groups, except for a dominant one (in case of Lithuania – Lithuanians); at the same time the Soviet regime didn't acknowledge the Holocaust as an exceptional case. As far as we know, they used to talk about the killing of Soviet citizens. A lot has changed in recent years. During the last 20 years Lithuanian historians published more books and articles on Jewish history than during all previous periods of professional history writing. The main topic is, of course, Holocaust in Lithuania and Lithuanian anti-Semitism. There are some understandable reasons for such concentration of attention on these topics. First of all, as I have already mentioned Shoa problematic was ignored during the Soviet times. Secondly, there is a political demand for such kind of publications. Thirdly, it's easier to write about the Lithuanian Antisemitism than about so-called inner-Jewish issues, since there is no need to learn Yiddish or Hebrew. Nevertheless, there was quite a significant number of important publications on other aspects of Jewish life in Lithuania by the younger generation of Lithuanian scholars, some of whom know Yiddish (Šarūnas Liekis, Jurgita Verbickienė, Eglė Bendikaitė, and others).

In terms of international cooperation, many changes took place in Lithuania during last 15 years. Many international conferences were organized in Lithuania, a collection of articles published(The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews, eds. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, Darius Staliūnas, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004; Jewish Space in Central and Eastern Europe. Day-to-day history, eds. J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, L. Lempertienė, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), special issues of international journals are devoted to the history of the Jews in Lithuania (Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung, 2012 and Polin 2012) etc. The last example of such a cooperation is a book „The history of Jews in Lithuania" written by an international team of scholars which is due to be published in Lithuanian till the

end of 2012. According to my impression the situation in Lithuania is much better in this regard than in Belarus.

T_P/BR: *Could you introduce the topic you are to deliver during the Second International Congress of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas? What would be your message to the Belarusian audience?*

DS: I'm going to present a paper where I'll compare the anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania and Belarus during the tsarist period. The main question is Why there were so few pogroms in Lithuania at the beginning of the 20th century, and so many in Belarus at the same time. I'll look for economic, political and confessional reasons which might explain this difference. My impression is that Belarusian historians are not interested in this topic and there are very few publications on pogroms in Belarus. Nevertheless I'm very interested in sharing my findings with Belarusian colleagues and getting their feedback.

The 44th Annual ASEEES Convention

On November 15-18, 2012 New Orleans (USA, state Louisiana) hosted the 44th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES).

This annual meeting is organized each year in a different city by one of the front-rank organizations focusing on CEE/NIS countries. The Convention is a huge event with an impressive number of participants in different panels and round tables; it is designed to provide a platform for cooperation and exchanging ideas among scholars whose research is focused on the CEE/NIS area.

This year's Convention provided quite a significant number of panels and papers devoted to Belarus-related issues. Even though due to various reasons a number of initially announced panels and papers were cancelled, the papers that were delivered have encompassed a considerable scope of Belarusian studies.

The Belarus-related papers covered the topic of language discourse and language usage in Belarus, state media in Belarus, population's electoral choices, Belarus-Russia relations and post-Soviet integration, historical memory and cultural identity in Belarus, re-evaluation of the past Soviet role of history in the contemporary state policies in today's Belarus.

During the Convention a meeting of the North American Association of Belarusian Studies (NAABS) took also place. This meeting discussed the financial situation of the organization and the 2013 ASEEES Convention scheduled to take place in Boston. There were announcements on the third course of the International Summer School of Belarusian Studies (July 7 - August 4, 2013 in Hajnaŭka/Hajnówka) organized by the Center for Belarusian Studies at Southwestern College and co-sponsored by the Belarusian Historical Society, as well as on the reactivation of the *Journal of Belarusian Studies* after 24 years of silence.

The NAABS has also recently announced the results of the 2009 Zora Kipel Memorial Prize for the best article in Belarusian studies. It was awarded to Alexander Pershai's article *Localness and Mobility in the Belarusian Nationalism: The Tactic of Tuteishaść* (Nationalities Papers 36.1 (2008): 85-103). In acknowledgement of this award the *Nationalities Papers* and *Taylor & Francis Publications* have announced a free access to the winning article until late 2013 at http://www.tandfonline.com. On behalf of the *Belarusian Review* editorial board we congratulate Alexander Pershai on this success and proudly introduce his project "Women in Politics" in this issue.

Hanna Vasilevich

MEDIA WATCH

Press Review

"Women in Politics" – a new educational publication about Belarus and the post-socialist space

A Belarusian women's non-profit organization "ADLIGA – The International Centre for Gender initiatives: Women for Full Citizenship" is happy to announce this new publication. It is an educational feminist journal entitled "Women in Politics: New Approaches to the Political" – «Женщины в политике: Новые подоходы к политическому».

The journal advances the education of the Belarusian people on the subject of gender. It raises gender awareness among political actors and promotes equality of opportunity for women in Belarus. The journal contributes to an anti-oppression body of teaching materials on women's, gender and sexuality issues. It aims to bring about positive changes in the education sector of Belarus and other Eastern European post-socialist countries. The journal also targets political and social activists in Belarus and other former Soviet countries. It speaks to a generation of emerging scholars interested in political, social and cultural concerns related to women's participation in political movements in Belarus and gender studies in general.

The goals of this publication are two-fold. On the one hand, it is an educational project: it advances the education of the Belarusian people on the subject of gender. There are very few courses in the university curriculum in Belarus that address gender issues, especially the intersection of politics and gender. Women's and gender issues have even less exposure in the secondary and high school curricula. There is a strong need to introduce basic concepts of gender rights and equity to Belarusian society and young people in particular. Many Belarusians are heteronormative and homophobic, therefore it is necessary to educate and encourage young women to enter the public sphere and political life.

On the other hand, the journal offers critical analysis of current events in Belarusian society and the post-Soviet countries. It focuses on the issues of women's participation in political and public life in Belarus. It gives a voice to emerging and young scholars who work with the category of gender in political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, linguistics, nationalism and cultural studies. The journal also

supports young artists who work with politically and socially charged issues.

The journal "Women in Politics" emerged as part of a project on the inclusion of women in politics. The project is supported by "ADLIGA - the International Centre for Gender Initiatives: Women for Full Citizenship" – a non-profit organization which struggles for gender equality and equity, and fights against social deprivation and other kinds of injustice.

The journal "Women in Politics" comes out twice a year. It features articles in Belarusian and Russian (depending on the author's preference). It offers a series of thematically organized issues in order to be more accessible to the general public and potentially be used for various secondary and high school courses, activist training programs and self-education initiatives. We are currently planning and working on forthcoming issues that will address the following topics: the politics of knowledge and public education, social equality, gender in media policies, activism and international networking, capitalism, body image, women in disaster studies, and more. The journal is available free of charge at: http://adliga.info/newpolitics/ Printed copies are distributed free of charge through our network of Eastern European non-profit organizations.

The journal "Women in Politics" is a self-funded not-for-profit initiative. We seek funding for each issue of the journal. It is important to assure that the journal comes out in digital and printed forms. Printed materials and books especially retain great symbolic and cultural value in Eastern Europe. Despite the global "digitalization" many people in Belarus prefer to read printed books and journals. Many even print digital texts and work with the hard copies. At the same time, many activist websites are banned on the Belarusian internet; printed copies are necessary to guarantee the journal is available to the Belarusian general public. If you are interested in supporting the journal please contact the editorial at the email below or, alternatively, please spread the word.

The first issue of the journal was published in April 2012. It was entitled "Pol politiki" and addressed the issue of women's participation in Belarusian public life and other problems related to gender studies in post-Soviet countries. As of November 2012, the first issue was downloaded over 1,500 times and counting.

The second issue of the journal tackles the topic of "Personal as Political" and analyzes women's involvement in post-socialist political actions and reproductive rights debates in Belarus. The second issue is coming out in February 2013.

The editorial calls for contributions to the third issue of the journal "Women in Politics" that analyze the relationships between public and private in post-Soviet Belarus and beyond. Suggested topics for articles and art-projects include but are not limited to:

- Political theory and the issue of private/public;
- Public discourses about private issues;
- Belarusian media about private things;
- When does the private in everyday life become public?;
- Children and careers;
- Sexuality and Belarusian public discourse;
- Medical and body issues;
- Women's equality at home and at a work place.

Please submit your manuscripts to: political.new.approaches@gmail.com by April 15, 2013.

We hope that the broadest audience will find this publication interesting and inspiring. The editorial board is happy receive your feedback, please contact us at the email indicated below.

Alexander Persháі and Evgenia Ivanova,
Editors of the journal "Women in Politics",
Contact: political.new.approaches@gmail.com

Book Reviews

Andrew Savchenko: Belarus – a Perpetual Borderland. Brill Academic Publishers, 2009

By Kiryl Kascian, Hanna Vasilevich

The author describes the disciplinary affiliation of his book as a "rather eclectic" chronologically-structured piece of work between sociology and political science with "several clusters of economic analysis scattered throughout the text." (p.IX). While applying fitting theories and conceptual frameworks, he declares the goal "to investigate Belarus's propensity to retain the Soviet-era social structures and institutions" and "to explain the current peculiarities of Belarus's social and political landscape by investigating the country's long history as a borderland between Russia and Europe." (ibid)

The book consists of three parts as well as the introduction and conclusion.

Introduction is entitled "Images, Concepts and History of a Borderland" and addresses these issues with the perspective on ~~the~~ Belarus' situation. The author argues that the current peculiarities of ~~the~~ Belarus' development should be explained through the perspective of Belarus' borderland position which heavily influenced the country's development toward modernity. The author shows the peculiarities of the Belarus' urban landscape as a visible characteristic of the country's borderland status; the Soviet architecture of Minsk restored from ruins after ~~the~~ WWII is seen as a reflection of the country's history as well. (pp.2-3). The author emphasises that it is common for the authors to stress Belarus' position between the East and the West (Vakar, Zaprudnik, Marples). The location between its powerful and culturally different neighbours, Poland and Russia, is supported by theoretical reference to civilizational vision of world history and politics (Belohradsky, Huntington, Parsons). Savchenko stresses that the cultures' influences of these two powerful neighbouring countries may thus be seen as "a major determinant of Belarus' identity, comparable in its significance with its indigenous tendencies." (p.5). The author claims thus that, in contrast with Europe with its increasingly post-modern and post-national self-perception, "for Belarus modernity and nationality still provide the main frame of reference." (p.1). Hence, the book focuses on "the Belarusian national idea that found its realization in modern national institutions only from 1920s onwards, as a part of the Soviet project." (ibid) Therefore, it is argued that after the collapse of the USSR, Belarus and its elites had no other vision of

nationhood but "a set of national institutions inherited from the Soviet era that could only survive in a symbiosis with Russia." (ibid).

Chapter one is entitled "The Making of a Borderland" and focuses on ~~the~~ Belarus' situation during the modernization and national development which chronologically cover the period from the 16th century till the end of the WWI. The chapter starts with the author's thesis that independent Belarus "failed to develop political and cultural institutions associated with modern Europe" (p.15). He argues that most nations on Europe's eastern periphery that were formerly dominated by Russia (Baltic states or Ukraine) "tend to think of themselves as members of a particular European "neighborhood" which however is not the case of Belarus since "it never had a strong current of public opinion or an infl uential group of intellectuals, which would envision the Belarusian nation-state within a particular European "neighborhood" (pp.15-16). Savchenko also describes the Baltics' interwar nation-state experience and thus makes a diachronic comparison between interwar Baltic states and post-Soviet Belarus arguing on certain similarities such as developing ~~of~~ its own national institutions and symbols (even though with ~~their~~ different natures and meanings), a drive from ineffective democracy combined with considerable economic hardships towards "a relatively benign dictatorship" (p.18).

Even though the chronological description of Belarus' national development from the 16th century till the end of the WWI provided in this chapter is rather accurate and multi-perspective, one cannot omit certain aspects that need to be addressed.

First, Savchenko argues that the GDL gentry "conducted business of the state in the language they called Russian" while stating several sentences later that the original term ruski "would be more correctly translated as Ruthenian" (p.28). This game involving terminology seems at least unnecessary since it raises more questions than it provides answers and to certain extent misguides a reader unfamiliar with the history of the region. Possible debates on names' shifts in time, unification of terminology, as well as its external and internal application which might emerge from the authors' reasoning are thus skipped. Furthermore, while rightfully showing later "nationalisation" of the GDL history, the author makes some contradictory statements. While arguing that the GDL political nation (i.e. nobility) "was neither Belarusian nor Russian, certainly not in the latter day meaning of the term", Savchenko simultaneously emphasises its division in "ethnically Lithuanian" and "Slavic" sections with subsequent religious division along ~~the~~ ethnic lines. Furthermore, he stresses that "the whole discussion of the ethnic origins of the Slavic section of the Lithuanian nobility is largely a projection of political views of modern observers on an entirely different cultural and political structure" (p. 28). Even though the latter assumption is formally reasonable since the pre-modern identities differ considerably from the modern ones, special separation of the GDL ethnic Baltic component and its virtual equation with the modern Lithuanian ethnic allegiance seems at least contradictory with the common allegiance of the GDL nobility toward the country.

Second, the author is at least unfamiliar with the history of the Belarusian language, particularly with the development of the tradition for using the Latin alphabet to write in Belarusian. For instance, while citing Syrokomla's verse in Belarusian about the Krakow uprising of 1846, Savchenko argues that its spelling "is neither Polish nor Belarusian" (p. 52) even though the Latin transcript mode rather resembles the variant that Belarusian authors of those time used. The insufficient knowledge of the history of the Belarusian language may also be seen in the way of transliterating Mużyckaja Prauda (Peasant Truth) as "Muzhitskaya Pravda" (p.44), an anti-Russian bulletin in the Belarusian Latin script produced by Kastuś Kalinoŭski. As regard to the language issue, it is also remarkable that Savchenko quite unreasonably uses different ways to spell names of two generations of the Belarusian national movement leaders. While the first generation of national activists is spelled Polish-like (Bohuszewicz, Dunin-Marcinkiewicz), the second one is written according to the LOC rules (Lutskevich, Pashkevich, Bahdanovich).

Chapter two is entitled "Ex Oriente Lux". It chronologically starts with the end of the WWI and ends with the collapse of the USSR. Similarly as in the chapter one, it is rather consistent in terms of providing historical description of the Belarusian lands and depicting different policies pursued there during different periods of time. Nevertheless, certain statements made in the chapter require somewhat closer attention.

First, the description of the city of Vilnius for the Belarusian elites provided by Savchenko is at least as inconsistent as his equation of the ethnic Baltic section of the GDL political nation with the modern Lithuanian ethnic allegiance. While arguing that historically in Vilnius "political power was in the hands of Lithuanians, then Poles, then Russians" (p.69), Savchenko himself takes a role "of modern observers on an entirely different cultural and political structure", nationalizes the GDL history by siding with the modern Lithuanian nationalism, and omits debating the shifts of names' meanings in time.

Secondly, the author rightfully underlines the fact that "Bolsheviks in ethnically Belarusian territories concentrated their mobilizing efforts on soldiers, most of whom were not Belarusians" explaining it through Bolsheviks' apparent "lack of interest in exploring the potential appeal of a Communist message to the Belarusian population" (p. 71). However, the presence of the front line in Belarus is portrayed rather statically as there have hardly been any changes such as the evacuation of a significant number of the Belarusian population to the central Russia and their replacement by the surplus of over a million and a half soldiers from all over the Russian Empire. Such a demographic shift significantly limited the political opportunities of the various fragments of the Belarusian nationally-oriented political scene. Additionally, the role of Belarusian communists in 1918 to establish a separate Belarusian national communist entity who managed to convince Stalin to establish an autonomous Belarusian

Soviet Republic and thus to diminish the role of foreigners in the soviet authorities that had been established on the territory of Belarus is omitted, even though the emergence of the BSSR has been carefully depicted by such renowned scholars as Vadzim Krutalevič (soviet view) or Wiktor Sukiennicki (western view).

Third, the author rightfully argues that in terms of Russification policies Belarus was the most advanced Soviet republic, points out the role of Belarusian language for the "partisan" generation of the Communist elites as the language they used in everyday communication with the locals, and particularly describes Khrushchev's visible irritation with Mazuraŭ's linguistic choice for making his public address in Belarusian during former's visit to Minsk (p.143). Furthermore, Savchenko correctly undelines the fact that "Belarusian national Communist and simply nationalist elites that laid foundations for the Belarusian national state in the 1920s were destroyed in the purges of the 1930s" while "Belarusian leaders of the post-war generation, while conscious of their national identity, knew that the nationalism of the "korenizatsiya" period was ideologically impermissible" (p.139). At the same time, it is questionable whether "in the cultural sphere, Belarusian elites accepted their country's role as a testing ground for Russification under the guise of Soviet internationalism" (p.142) so that it was a compromise between the government bureaucrats and the so-called "creative intelligentsia". While rightfully emphasizing the significant differences between individual Soviet republics in terms of using the national language, Savchenko concludes that "situation in Belarus was not a result of a concerted effort made by central authorities in Moscow to stamp out national cultures in every Soviet republic" (p.139). The validity of such statement is at least questionable since every republic had its own niche of opportunities to act. First, one should not underestimate the promotion of the concept of the so-called "tri-unite east Slavic people" by the Soviet authorities which may be seen as an additional ideological tool for Moscow to assimilate culturally and linguistically close Belarusians and Ukrainians. Second, in case of Belarus, this niche was filled with the economic sphere which enabled the country to undergo the rapid modernization in the post-war period. As far as the cultural sphere was concerned, particularly Mašeraŭ had somewhat little space for manoeuvre in order to pursue "nationalizing" policies in the BSSR. At the same time, both Mazuraŭ and Mašeraŭ promoted and protected Belarusian intellectuals, artists and musicians, who occupied leading positions in the republic and by virtue of their high positions were able the to pursue cultural policies. An assumption of a limited cultural niche for the Belarusian SSR has recently been confirmed by a Belarusian poet H. Buraŭkin, the then chief of the Belarusian SSR State TV and Radio Company, who argued that Mašeraŭ supported his endeavours on Belarusization of the republican TV indirectly, since any support expressed publicly would mean his immediate removal from his position by the Soviet central authorities in Moscow.

Chapter three bears name "Borderland Forever: Modern Belarus" and describes the political, social and economic development of the country from the twilight of the Soviet era up to the present. This chapter seems to be the strongest and the most comprehensive part of the work. Savchenko provides an extensive characteristic of the Belarusian Communist Party in 1980s headed by sovietized and denationalized technocrats from the so-called Minsk Industrial Group, the role of Chornobyl catastrophe and Kurapaty findings for the Belarusian national consciousness, emergence and development of the Belarusian Popular Front, as well as the political developments in the BSSR in the last years of the USSR existence (pp.145-159). Author further analyses economic developments in the country comparing economic policies of the Belarusian authorities with the similar endeavors in the Baltic States (pp.159-170). Savchenko further depicts the election of Aliaksandr Lukašenka to the post of president and his further rise against the background of the main political forces of the country at ttat time (pp.171-189). The last part of the chapter eloquently entitled "Political economy of institutional symbiosis: Belarus and Russia building the future together" (pp.189-224) depicts Belarus-Russia relations in a multi-dimensional perspective covering politics, economy, military and security issues; it also deals with the recent political and economic developments in the country.

The conclusion entitled "Whither Belarus?" represents a summary of the major findings of the book. Despite possible alternative scenarios of Belarus' future, Savchenko argues that "Belarus will not become another Russian province – institutional symbiosis allows each country to achieve its goals without full political integration. It will, however, remain Russia's borderland until such time as Russian leadership changes its mind about the usefulness of such an arrangement" (p.229).

The book leaves quite a controversial impression – its strong assets are exploitation of the concept of borderland toward the Belarusian reality as well as the analysis of the contemporary developments in the country provided in chapter three. The historical part, both pre-Soviet and Soviet periods (chapters one and two), despite their relative consistency and accuracy contains certain statements which remain quite stereotypical or at least questionable. Such a distinction is quite typical for the studies on Belarus produced in the West – even the most solid analyses of the contemporary period have not yet fully provided all explanations of Belarusian identity and distinctiveness without an objective focus on Belarusian history, language and culture. Another shortcoming of Savchenko's book is his way of transliterating Belarusian personal and geographic names – they are transliterated mostly from Russian, and occasionally from Belarusian LOC or Polish. Such a choice does not contribute to the understanding of Belarusian cultural and linguistic distinctiveness by a foreign reader unfamiliar with ~~the~~ Belarusian issues. Nevertheless, despite certain shortcomings described above, Andrew Savchenko's book may still be seen as a valuable

contribution to Belarusian studies produced in the West – the author used a challenging approach toward Belarusian situation showing Belarusian national development from the XVI century up to the present, even though using existing stereotypes.

Review of a book by Dr. Smilovitsky

Leonid Smilovitsky: *"Evrei v Turove: istoriia mestechka Mozyrskogo Poles'ia."*

C. Jews in Turov: *History of a Shtetl in Mozyr´s Polesye Region.*

Jerusalem: 2008, 799p., photo and other documentary attachments

Leonid Smilovitsky, an internationally established historian of Belarusian Jewry, is author of a remarkable monograph on the history of the Jewish community in **the** Belarusian town of Turov (Turaŭ). Smilovitsky's goal was to write a comprehensive study for both academia and for all interested in the history of Russian and European Jewry, and he fulfilled his intention in a very qualitative way.

Turov is one of the oldest towns on the territory of Belarus and was always exposed to the Russian, Ukrainian and Polish influences. The study examines the social structure, the economic, ethnic and national and spiritual life in this town. Further, the educational issues, family life and living conditions, healthcare have been included, as well as the influences of Russian revolutions. Major attention has been paid to the issues of emigration and of the pogroms, various persecutions including persecution of Zionists, of the synagogues and Stalinist repressions. Finally, the author documents the tragedy of the Turov Jewish community during the Nazi occupation as well as the problems of the post-WWII restoration of Turov.

The book is based on a detailed exploration of archival documents and literature on the topic and to its larger context. The author used also historical statistical data, periodicals and also implemented methods of oral history using testimony of survivors and their ancestors.

The author's work on the book and its publication was supported by many persons from Israel, Belarus, Russia, Germany, Australia, Great Britain and United States. This support demonstrates an interest in the publication of the monograph.

The book has been written in Russian, but its title is also in English and the English Introduction and Contents allow a basic orientation in the structure and objective of the monograph also to those who do not read Russian.

The book is structured in four sections which are further divided into chapters. First two sections are composed of a larger number of chapters. First section called *Our Roots* discusses in fifteen chapters many issues indicated above (nature and people, family, life, religion, Jewish education, medicine, emigration and other). Second section called *Between Two World Wars* in fourteen chapters examines pogroms of 1918-1921, Zionist movement, Collectivization, the Soviet Yiddish schools, search of happiness in the Crimea, routing of the Jewish religion, repressions and other issues.

The size and structure of the sections are not balanced – in length the first two sections have 200 and 300 pages each while the last two sections are extremely short – 35 pages each – and this unbalanced structure is undoubtedly a shortcoming. It would be a very valuable if the author commits to the deeper examination of the post WWII period.

A large documentary attachment contains a set of very valuable materials: lists of Jewish citizens of Turov in various historical periods, lists of victims of pogroms, lists of members of associations and organizations. There is a very large list of Jewish soldiers from Turov participating in the WWII and a deeply touching list of eight pages, two columns each, of the Jews from Turov who perished in the Holocaust, while after the WWII just 68 names of Jews have been recorded.

The monograph includes a terminological glossary, a list of abbreviations, a name and location index and other apparatus which facilitates not only the usage of this book, but could serve the researchers of Eastern European Jewish issues in general. A collection of historical photographs is also very interesting.

In conclusion, I value Leonid Smilovicky's monograph very highly. His detailed examination of fates of Jewish community in Turov offers an excellent micro-historical insight which has, however, a larger macro-historical validity. The author very appropriately connects the history of Turov into a larger historical context and thus, his monograph serves not only as the knowledge source of the history of Jewry in **the** Belarusian town of Turov, but also as a study to a history of Eastern Europe.

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ECONOMY

Belarus' Economic Turnaround: Is It Sustainable?

By David Marples

In early December, the Anti-Crisis Fund Council of the Eurasian Economic Community approved the latest (fourth) tranche of a $3 billion loan (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, December 7), approved in June 2011 to assist Belarus in overcoming an economic crisis. The Council is expected to release two further tranches in 2013. At the time the loan received sanction, the country was suffering from rampant inflation and had twice devalued the national

currency, from 3,000 Belarusian rubles to the US dollar, to 8,500 to 1. Another problem was the depletion of gold and currency reserves. Some 18 months later, the government is lauding the country's steady economic growth, replenishing of reserves and reduction of inflation, and is anticipating high growth rates in 2013. The question is whether the depiction of a dramatic economic turnaround is as accurate as portrayed.

In mid-November at the Belarus Investment Forum, Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich, commented that Belarusians' wages in both Belarusian rubles and dollars were increasing and that the population had strengthened its purchasing power. He anticipated "vigorous growth" in 2013. Inflation was likely to be 20 percent for the year, five times less than in 2011 (Belarusian Telegraph Agency, November 16). In his November 27 interview with Reuters, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka anticipated an 8.5-percent increase in GDP in 2013, which would allow Belarus to repay its debts on previous loans. But most analysts are skeptical about Belarus's ability to overcome the crisis so readily. Myasnikovich agreed that the country had been on the verge of default.

Vital Rymasheuski, co-chairman of the Belarusian Christian-Democratic Party, maintains that the European Union rescued Belarus by purchasing Belarus's oil products, with support also coming from Russia, and murky export schemes for solvents and thinners (see EDM, November 27). Economist Barys Zhaliba believes that the Anti-Crisis Council's loan saved Belarus from collapse (charter97.org, November 16). The main problem today is that repayment of debts actually lowers GDP growth. Anton Boltochko notes that the country needs to find additional sources of revenues.

The prevailing picture in Belarus is one of a government revisiting old remedies that prolong rather than eradicate the problems, and avoid any serious structural reforms that might address the greater predicament

And there are four possible means. First, it can revive exports to raise some $1.5–2 billion with schemes such as the sale of solvents. But this is a short-term solution that is reliant on manipulating the rules of the Customs Union.

Second, it can attract additional credits from organizations like the IMF.

Third, Belarus can either negotiate discounts for oil imports from Russia that are to be refined and resold or request more credits from Russia.

And fourth, an option is to sell state-owned companies, a method that is under constant discussion but without many concrete results. Besides, the notion of selling off the most profitable firms, such as the potash company Belaruskali, seems irrational (naviny.by, December 3). Only the second and fourth alternatives merit serious discussion. Russia is unlikely to countenance willingly further distortions of the Custom Union's regulations, and requests for new loans from Moscow to Minsk are hardly a viable means to meet high debt repayments.

Yaraslau Ramanchuk, head of the Mises Research Center in Minsk, commented that Belarus' command economy "had exhausted its resources" and Russia was unwilling to issue further loans (AP, December 4). The IMF, which will discuss Belarus on December 14, has been quite critical of state economic policies. Belarus' foreign debt now stands at $12 billion, with a repayment of $3 billion required next year—and slightly more than half of that figure consists of repayments to the IMF loan.

The IMF mission to Belarus on October 18–29 advised the National Bank of Belarus to increase interest rates and halt unwarranted wage increases. Lukashenka's response was that the agency should stop playing politics (http://bdg.by/news/economics/19384.html; Reuters, November 27). Concerning option four, Lukashenka also revealed in his Reuters interview that five companies were interested in the sale of Belaruskali: one Chinese, one Indian, one based in an Arab state and two from Europe. He stated that the estimated price for the potash company is $30–32 billion. At the Investment Forum, on the other hand, Vice-Premier Uladzimir Siamashka came up with a price of $34–36 billion, and said that the state was willing to sell 10–15 percent of its shares (tut.by, December 2). Siamashka also revealed that the government is ready to resume negotiations for the sale of state shares of Naftan, a merged company from the Navapolatsk Oil Refinery and the Palimir Petrochemical Works. But to date, the anticipated offers from Russian companies have not emerged. As with Belaruskali, MTS, and others, the general perspective of the potential investors and purchasers is that the prices have been set too high.

Meanwhile, Belarusians continue to struggle. The average salary is now around $170-220, as opposed to $500 before deflation. In order to prevent a mass exodus of workers to Russia, where wages are higher, the president has introduced a ban on moving jobs for wood-processing workers, while pledging to increase wages to $1,000 by 2015. About one million residents of Belarus (around 14 percent of the workforce) are already working abroad in Russia and the eastern EU countries. The ban has been termed the "Serfdom Decree" by some critics. Employees of the affected firms can no longer resign without the permission of their managers (http://charter97.org/ru/news/2012/12/7/62491/). The likelihood is that the law will shortly be applied to other companies because workers are unlikely to be satiated with promises of future wage increases. The prevailing picture in Belarus is one of a government revisiting old remedies that prolong rather than eradicate the problems, and avoid any serious structural reforms that might address the greater predicament.

Source: : Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 9 Issue: 227, December 12, 2012

Deteriorating Foreign Trade Is Belarusian Economy's Biggest Problem

Foreign trade balance was negative in September. Negotiations about crude oil supply resulted in nothing, which increased uncertainty about oil derivatives exports, the main Belarusian product. Negative outlook on a number of export products may cause problems on the foreign exchange market with the situation deteriorating in 2013.

On November 2nd, 2012 a discussion about Belarusian goods export took place.

On October 30th, 2012 data on merchandise trade in September was published. The balance was minus USD 358 million. The main cause behind the fall was a significant decrease in the export of Belarusian goods against less significant reduction in imports.

So far the Government addressed the problem by increasing physical export volumes to the traditional markets and lowering prices for Belarusian goods. Against this background the abolition of minimum indicative prices for exported beef and pork was a forced measure. Belarusian meat and meat products lost competitiveness in the Russian market. Increased (or even maintained at the same level) export revenues from meat are only possible at lower prices. One of the largest exports among food products will experience increasing pressure from the EU because of Russia's WTO accession and a number of reduced duties.

The founding of the Export Council, which consisted of a number of significant figures in Belarusian private business was a decorative measure, demonstrating the size of the problem. The Belarusian government has no idea how to address these problems and tries to use decorative formations to demonstrate some activity.

Now the focus is on the negotiations in Moscow about oil supply in 2012 -2013. The lack of result implies that Russia has taken a very tough stance after the solvent-lubricant scam. In October oil supplies were cut down, despite Belarus' assurances about potential increase in oil supply to reach the previously agreed volumes. Oil deliveries for 2013 have not been agreed yet.

Problems in foreign trade impact the entire economy. The National Bank has to take measures to substantially reduce lending to the real sector. Rates on the interbank market are prohibitive for most businesses. If carried out, privatization will replenish the gold reserves, and will not solve the forex market problem.

Thus, the government is in a difficult situation. Problems with export require short-term solutions, but in some cases, the situation is not dependent on the government, for instance, with potash exports. In other cases, prices need to be reduced, which is challenging due to costly production. If the government undertakes no effort, the situation could deteriorate and foreign exchange market could become imbalanced. However, that is the most probable solution the government will implement – wait and hope for the situation to resolve on its own accord.

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, November 6, 2012

Belarus Reduces Potash Production

Potash fertilizer's exports to foreign markets have reduced for objective reasons. The usual administrative levers used by the Belarusian leadership in a crisis, are useless in this case. Potash fertilizer's production has to be cut down for the sake of potassium chloride export prices.

On December 7th, a governmental meeting about potash fertilizers' exports took place.

In 2012 one of the main Belarusian exports, potassium chloride, may be in trouble. Potash production in January-October 2012 decreased by 6.8% compared with 2011. The projected foreign-currency proceeds at USD 3.2 billion by the year-end will not be met due to the lack of contracts with China.

There are few players at the global potash market. In order to maintain potassium chloride export prices, potash producers are prepared to cut production and to reduce exports.

In January – September 2012 exports of Belarusian potash fertilizers have been reduced in physical terms by 17.8%, while in value terms, exports fell by 14.3% over the same period in 2011. Potassium chloride price was maintained and even increased by a significant reduction in the supply volume.

Belaruskali's partner in Belarusian Potash Company (BPC is the monopoly trader of Belarusian and Russian fertilizer producers in the world market), Uralkali, in December 2012-April 2013, will reduce the potash fertilizers' production in order to bring the Chinese stocks down to 2 million tones. That would be the starting point for a new round of negotiations about the potash fertilizers supply to the market. The production volumes could be recovered, but not until May 2013.

Belaruskali's performance in 2012, the global economic situation, plans of Belaruskali's business partners, and no high-profile personnel changes in the Belaruskali's management may imply the following. The Belarusian government, despite the need for foreign-currency proceeds and habitual adherence to administrative management style, now has to adjust to the situation and agree to a reduced production of potash fertilizers along the same lines as BPC's partner (volume and timeframe), for the sake of maintaining the price at the current level. An alternative would be to reduce the contract price, which is unacceptable not only for the Russian partners, but also for the main market exporter

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, December 12, 2012

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

Parliamentary Elections in Belarus Arouse Cynicism, Anger Among Population

By David Marples

The 2012 parliamentary elections in Belarus were held on September 23. In contrast to some earlier elections, the authorities blatantly violated procedures and inflated voter turnout, according to several sources. In turn the opposition, having failed to unite initially in a Coalition of Six, was further divided between those who chose to boycott the elections on the eve of the vote and those who decided to take part in the final voting (none won any seats). And as usual, observers from CIS countries found nothing wrong with the way the elections were conducted, but those from the OSCE and elsewhere identified numerous violations. Overall, neither the authorities nor the opposition seemed to take the election very seriously, but neither did the voters. The parliamentary elections in Belarus have come to represent a carefully conducted charade rather than the genuine expression of the electorate.

Even prior to the vote, the cynical attitude of the electorate was evident from a June 2012 poll by the Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Research, which revealed that only 36.8 percent of respondents expected the elections to be free and fair (39 percent did not anticipate such an outcome), as compared to corresponding figures of 45.9 percent and 34.8 percent, respectively, in 2008. Only 36.7 percent thought that the results would reflect the actual voting (54.5 percent did not), and just 38.5 percent considered that the elected House of Representatives would represent the interests of society; while over 40 percent responded that the parliament would have no influence on their lives or of those close to them. The skepticism expressed also extended to the opposition: only 37.7 percent believed that candidates from the opposition would present credible programs for the improvement of living conditions (iiseps.org/press15.html). A poll conducted by the news agency Tut.by revealed that 77.8 percent saw no sense in voting (cited by Charter97.org, September 23).

On September 23, 293 candidates contested the available 110 seats in the lower house. But that number fell as a result of the decision of the two main opposition political parties, the Popular Front (30 candidates) and the United Civic Party (35), to withdraw their candidacies on September 15. In the words of Uladzimir Padhol, a candidate from the Popular Front in Minsk District 107, on September 23, they were going to the forest to pick mushrooms (http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24704121.html). As a result, in 16 of the 110 constituencies there was only a single candidate left running. By contrast, the Social Democratic Party (Hramada), the Movement for Freedom, Tell the Truth, and the anti-regime Communists of the Fair World opted to continue their campaigns. Initially there were 139 candidates from non-ruling political parties (47 percent), but almost half (69) came from the Liberal-Democratic Party, which is not considered part of the opposition (news.tut.by, September 23).

The presidential newspaper published a pre-election editorial declaring: "This is your choice," which noted that 7,078,809 were listed on election registers (SB—Belarus Segodnya, September 22). Yet, other sources suggest the choice was clearly not a free one. The human rights agency Vyasna reported many examples of refusal of candidates' rights to the five-minute TV and radio appearances and, by issuing Decree 93, the Supervisory Council banned the appearance of those candidates who had expressed a wish to boycott the elections. Some TV stations demanded that speeches be pre-recorded and then refused to air them—this occurred in at least three districts of Homiel. Election debates were held in only a minority of locations. There were none at all in Hrodna region. Opposition party candidates found it very difficult to use private campaign funds because of bureaucratic obstacles, whereas state agencies brazenly backed their chosen candidates, with some factories allowing meetings with voters during working hours. Three Minsk printing firms refused to produce election campaign material paid from the private means of opposition candidates. However, private payment for campaign ads is, in fact, legal under the election law (spring96.org, September 22).

There were markedly different assessments of official turnout. The Central Election Commission reported that the 50 percent threshold had been reached by 4 p.m. on September 23, whereas independent observers recorded a turnout of only 35 percent at that time, and only 44.7 percent overall (*Nasha Niva*, September 24). Election turnout reportedly increased by an improbable 18 percent in a two-hour period in the afternoon. One analyst who posted a synopsis to the Jamestown Foundation noted a number of other discrepancies. They included the fact that during the five days of early voting, ballot boxes were locked inside public buildings to which only state officials had access. In some factories the management introduced a short working day and threatened to check whether their employees had in fact voted. Heads of schools promised students future holidays if they voted early. Almost 26 percent of voters took part in early voting (news.tut.by, September 23). The authorities also introduced a so-called "carousel" voting system, whereby the same people were taken to vote at several ballot stations. Two observers who noted the infractions at a polling station in Minsk were removed and detained by the police until voting ended (Letter to Jamestown from Hanna Asipova, September 23). Another source confirms the identity of those arrested at Minsk District 101 as Syarhei Martsaleu, an observer from the Popular Front, and Aryna Lisetskaya from the Movement for Freedom (euroradio.fm, September 23).

Dozens of opposition activists were arrested during the campaign, mostly for possessing campaign materials in

support of the boycott. Some candidates, like Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the Movement for Freedom, were not permitted to run. Even some OSCE observers were turned away at the Minsk International Airport. This fate befell Lithuanian deputy of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Emanuelis Zingeris and German deputy Mariluise Beck, both of whom have been critical of the Lukashenka regime in the past. Beck declared that the denial to them of visas to monitor the election was an insult to the OSCE and its election monitoring organization, to which all OSCE members had assented, including Belarus (Telegraf.by, September 20). Special coordinator of the OSCE observer mission, Matteo Meccaci, declared that "This election was not competitive from the start," noting that candidates were never free to "speak, organize, and run for office" (OSCE Press Release, September 24). Riot police arrested 20 observers from the agency Election Monitoring and took them to the Central Police Station (*Nasha Niva*, September 24).

Arguably, since Parliament is closely controlled by the president and has little independent authority or initiative, the elections are essentially ritualistic. The campaign was devoid of enthusiasm. Voters seemed to have little interest in the individual candidates, and most deputies will represent factories and working collectives, as before. No opposition candidate has won a seat in the lower house since 2004. The authorities closely control official results both of the turnout and voting. At the same time, elections are an opportunity to discuss issues with voters and prepare for the more significant presidential elections, anticipated in 2015. That two opposition parties (as well as the unregistered Christian Democratic Party) chose to boycott the elections is understandable given the regime's refusal to release remaining political prisoners and permit more access to state media. But the divisions among the opposition also create the impression that the voters have no choice and that neither the current regime nor the opposition offers anything new. If the opposition cannot unite, it will never be able to offer a credible alternative.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 9 Issue: 173

Belarus Prison-Abuse Reports Spark Concerns About Jailed Dissidents

By Claire Bigg, Aleh Hruzdzilovich

Relatives and friends are worried about Zmitser Dashkevich's health, which they say has been deteriorating in recent months. His fiancee has not seen him since April 2011.

Concern is mounting over the well-being of jailed opposition figures in Belarus amid reports of prison abuse, including threats of torture, rape, and murder.

Human rights campaigners in Belarus and abroad are calling on Minsk to end what they describe as the mistreatment and intimidation of inmates held on politically motivated charges, in particular opposition figures Zmitser Dashkevich and Ales Byalyatski.

"The situation with political prisoners has been quite dire. People held on politically motivated charges have been singled out in detention," says Human Rights Watch's Yulia Gorbunova.

Human Rights Watch accused Belarusian authorities on October 2 of "retaliating against their critics even after they are thrown in jail" and urged Belarus to immediately investigate all instances of mistreatment.

The global rights group says ill-treatment of political detainees appears to be on the rise in Belarus, with inmates increasingly facing verbal abuse, unfair punishments, and psychological pressure.

Gorbunova says Dashkevich has also been subjected to alarming threats from prison staff, including "threats of rape by other inmates and of physical violence, up to murder. He's also subjected to verbal abuse and he's facing a lot of arbitrary punishment, including restriction on meetings with his relatives."

Platform, a Belarusian rights group monitoring the treatment of prisoners, sounded the alarm last week by filing a complaint to the United Nations' special rapporteur on torture.

Increasing Pressure

Rights groups have denounced a rollback on freedom since the reelection of authoritarian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in December 2010.

The election sparked massive street protests that led to the arrest of almost 700 people and the sentencing of dozens of protesters to jail terms.

Rights groups accuse Belarusian authorities of intensifying their crackdown on dissent over the past two years, detaining opposition activists, disbarring lawyers who defend detainees and intimidating rights campaigners and journalists.

Ales Byalyatski has been barred from seeing his family since May and is constantly punished.

A dozen opposition activists detained during or since the postelection protests still remain in detention.

These include Ales Byalyatski, the head of the Belarusian human rights center Vyasna, sentenced in November 2011 to 4 1/2 years in prison on charges of tax evasion; former presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich, jailed for six years in May 2011 for "organizing mass disturbances" following Lukashenka's reelection; and Dashkevich, the leader of the youth opposition movement Young Front, convicted to two years in March 2011 for hooliganism after an alleged brawl on the eve of the presidential election.

'Time To Clamp Down'

Dashkevich is barred from family visits and has spent months in an isolated cell. In August, he was sentenced to an additional year in prison on charges of repeatedly disobeying the prison administration.

Relatives and friends are worried about his health, which they say has been deteriorating in recent months.

On September 21, two days after being transferred to a new penal colony in the southwestern city of Mazyr, Dashkevich declared a hunger strike to protest what he said was "inhumane treatment" at the prison.

His fiancee, Nasta Palazhanka, has filed a request asking prosecutors to investigate the alleged abuse by prison authorities in Mazyr.

"As soon as he arrived there, attitudes toward him changed completely. Apparently they decided that it was time to clamp down on him, to further bear down on him. There were constant insults, insults to his dignity, his human dignity," she says.

"In order to put an end to this campaign of harassment, Dzmitser went on a hunger strike. So of course I'm worried about him, because of this hunger strike and this treatment of him in Mazyr, and because of the whole system of pressure that is bearing down on him."

Palazhanka says she has not seen Dashkevich since April 2011.

Constant Punishments

Human Rights Watch says Byalyatski has been barred from seeing his relatives since May. In June, he was declared a "repeated violator" of prison rules, making him ineligible for amnesty.

Activists say Byalyatski is subjected to routine reprimands, including restrictions on his mealtimes and on permissions to receive parcels and visits. Other prisoners are allegedly prohibited from talking to him.

Byalyatski, Dashkevich, Statkevich, and several other Belarusian detainees have been declared prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

Written in Prague by Claire Bigg based on reporting by Aleh Hruzdzilovich in Minsk

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 3, 2012

Is Europe's Last Dictator Planning A Return To Serfdom?

By Uladzimer Hlod and Robert Coalson

MINSK -- Despite a five-year modernization program, Belarus's wood-processing industry just can't hang onto its skilled workers.

Promises of higher wages and more attractive working conditions aren't doing the trick as workers continue to seek more lucrative employment in neighboring Russia.

So President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has come up with a different idea: forced labor.

"A decree is being prepared that says that until the end of the planned modernization and reconstruction of [wood-processing] enterprises [in 2015], workers are forbidden from quitting their jobs," Lukashenka announced during a visit to the Barysaudrev wood-processing plant in Barysau, a bleak industrial city about 40 kilometers northeast of Minsk, on November 30. "Workers cannot quit their jobs without the agreement and permission of the management of the enterprise."

He added that workers who left their jobs despite the warning would be sentenced to compulsory labor and returned to the production line.

The presidential decree codifying the threat was issued on December 7.

Repeat Offender

Lukashenka's move has struck a nerve in a country that hasn't forgotten its centuries-long history of serfdom.

Early interest: President Alyaksandr Lukashenka eyes a plank suspiciously during a 1999 visit to a wood plant in the town of Vileika.

"The only novelty here from the legal standpoint is the concept of forced employment, which is completely illegal," Syarhey Antusevich, deputy chairman of the Belarus Congress of Democratic Labor Unions, said. "I think that maybe the leader of the country just went off on a tangent, as he is sometimes prone to do, and decided to solve some serious, real problems in this way."

Antusevich noted, however, that the formal legal protections for workers in Belarus -- including those forbidding forced labor -- might not mean much.

"Things aren't that simple," Antusevich said. "The idea of forced employment is unacceptable and there are laws against it; on the other hand, we all know that in our country the law takes a backseat to the backroom instructions that control our courts, our prosecutor's office, and so on."

Belarus's move to compulsory labor has raised alarm bells abroad as well.

Stephen Benedict, the director of human and trade union rights at the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in Brussels, said Lukashenka's proposal violates the conventions of the UN's International Labor Organization (ILO), of which Belarus is a member.

"We think this is a direct and absolute violation of the most fundamental principles and rights of workers," Benedict said. "There are ILO conventions that very clearly lay these rights out, and Mr. Lukashenka is completely denying these rights and ignoring the advice that he has repeatedly received [from international organizations]."

The European Commission, which manages the European Union's Eastern Partnership program that includes Belarus and other former Soviet countries, declined to comment to RFE/RL, saying it was studying Lukashenka's initiative.

Chipping Away

Even before Lukashenka's decree was signed, workers at Barysaudrev were already said to have been prevented from quitting their jobs.

Wages at Barysaudrev average around $150 a month, but Lukashenka pledged to raise them to $400-$500 in 2013, which is approximately what wood-processing workers might hope to earn in neighboring Russia. Lukashenka also said wages in the sector would rise to $1,000 a month after the industry's modernization plan is completed in 2015.

Labor unions in Belarus have said they plan to send a formal complaint to the ILO.

And although the ILO declined to comment specifically of Lukashenka's Barysau initiative, it has long criticized Belarus for alleged violations of labor rights.

In November, the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association issued yet another report complaining of Minsk's

"lack of cooperation" on labor-rights issues.

The ILO report cited Belarus's failure to investigate numerous cases in which workers were allegedly prevented from engaging in labor actions or were blocked "from the assistance which might be provided by international organizations in order to carry out activities, including strikes." It also noted Minsk's failure to "implement the recommendations made by the United Nations special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers."

The ITUC's Benedict said that after Belarusian labor groups file a complaint with the ILO, the organization will review the case and can take action against Minsk.

"In due course...[Lukashenka's] government will be asked again to justify what they are doing," Benedict said, "and at some point there are some additional steps that can be taken through the International Labor Organization to exert additional pressure, up to and including economic sanctions. And that seems to be what he is looking for."

In addition, Benedict said the ITUC and its affiliates around the world could take action against Minsk. He also called on the European Union to "reconsider" its relations with Minsk if Lukashenka proceeded with compulsory labor.

Rough Around The Edges

Lukashenka's compulsory-labor initiative is one signal of his desperation over the slow progress of attempts to modernize an important export industry. The wood-processing sector comprises nine state-owned factories employing about 13,000 workers. At least 2,000 more workers are involved in the industry's ongoing reconstruction efforts and likely will be affected by Lukashenka's decree.

In 2007, the government allocated credits of more than 500 million euros ($660 million) to the sector for modernization. In 2010, it added a further 180 million euros. However, in his remarks in Barysau, Lukashenka said the efforts had all but collapsed. He said the program had been "dead" for the last "two or three years" and that purchased equipment was gathering dust in crates.

Lukashenka added that in the near future he plans to visit similar wood-processing plants in Vitsebsk and Mahilyou, where "no one will be forgiven and all personnel questions will be settled." He added ominously, but vaguely, that "we might lose half the government there."

The problems in the wood-processing industry are just part of the overall picture of Belarus's failing Soviet-style economy. Belarus has seen rampant inflation and currency devaluations this year and has become increasingly dependent on loans from Moscow.

At the end of November, Lukashenka declared 2013 to be "The Year of Frugality" in Belarus. Among other goals, the initiative aims to enhance "economic security" through "raising labor productivity" and "the rational use of resources."

"The measures outlined by the Year of Frugality will be aimed at raising the frugality awareness of every person, encouraging frugal attitudes in and out of their workstations," the decree states.

RFE/RL correspondent Rikard Jozwiak contributed to this report from Brussels

NEWS BRIEFS

October 3, 2012

Ministry of Natural Resources: regulation of the "Red List" animal stock is necessary

No European country prohibits the regulation of animals of the "Red List" stock. On October 3, 2012 this was announced by the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Anatol Lis at a press conference in Minsk, in reply to a BelaPAN question about the legality of licenses to shoot the "Red List" animals.(**Editor's Note**:"Red List" is an inventory of the conservation status of biological species.)

"One and a half month ago, we have hosted a conference with the participation of Polish specialists in the Bielavieža Forest, said Lis. – Poland (?) is now home for Europe's largest population of bisons – about 1,200 animals. In Belarus we have 1.050 animals which is the second-largest population. Once they were very scarce, and we had tto undertake the he task of save the bisons. Today, the optimum quantity of animals that may be contained in the Bielavieža Forest is 350; in reality there are 420 animals. If we do not control their quantity, they may begin perishing due to sickness. Besides, great damage is being done to the local flora, as greenery provides the main food supply for the bisons."

According to the Deputy Minister, in Poland the number of bisons is strictly controlled by means of hunting the weak and sick animals. "This year alone we have lost more than twenty bisons in the Bielavieža Forest, - he said. – Therefore regulation of the animal stock is necessary, but we should not turn it into the hunt, games, etc."

Source: BelaPAN

October 9, 2012

Skaryna's Bible Displayed

Germany's only copy of the Skaryna Bible, a translation of the Holy Scripture by 16th-century Belarusian printing pioneer Francishak Skaryna, was put on display in the National Library of Belarus in Minsk on October 4.

National Library experts are expected to make a digital copy of the Skaryna Bible by October 5.

The Bible came out in Prague between 1517 and 1519 in the Old Belarusian language. Its copy has been held in Gorlitz since 1527 and in the Upper Lusatian Library of Sciences in Gorlitz since 2003.

According to the library's director, Matthias Wenzel, the book has recently been exhibited in Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland.

A total of 360 copies of books printed by Francishak Skaryna have been found in the world, said Raman Matulski, director of the National Library, which holds all 10 of Belarus' Skaryna books.

Source: *Nasha Niva*

October 15, 2012

EU Ministers Opt To Keep Sanctions On Belarus

European Union foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg have resolved to keep sanctions in place against Belarus, but they are continuing to hold out the prospect of lifting sanctions if

Minsk improves its human rights record.

The sanctions are part of the EU's "critical engagement" policy with the government of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- an attempt to pressure Minsk to implement democratic reforms.

The EU again called on the Belarusian government to "stop harassment of civil society, the political opposition and the independent media."

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, speaking at a news conference in Luxembourg after the October 15 talks, singled out Belarus's widely condemned parliamentary elections on September 2 as a "missed opportunity."

"Parliamentary elections in Belarus were yet another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards, and we are very concerned about increased acts of harassment and repression of civil society and political opposition, as well as the diplomatic crisis with Sweden," Ashton said.

The EU ministers said sanctions already imposed on Belarus would not immediately be lifted for several reasons, including the continued detention of some political prisoners and the failure of the government to "rehabilitate" those political prisoners who have been released.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

October 16, 2012

Lukashenka Offers Russia Refineries-For-Gas Swap

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka says his country is prepared to sell its oil refineries to Russia but in exchange wants rights to join in natural-gas extraction projects in Russia.

Belarus has two oil refineries and Russian companies have shown an interest in purchasing them -- particularly the Mozyr refinery with a capacity to process some 95,000 barrels of oil per day.

Lukashenka says a deal could be reached but Belarus would want rights, as a foreigner, to help develop gas fields in Russia, and therefore receive gas at a lower price and receive a discount on oil processed at Belarusian refineries owned by Russia.

Lukashenka, who was speaking during a news conference in Minsk for Russian-language media outlets, praised the Russia-Belarus Union as "an example" of integration.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

October 26, 2012

Former Belarusian Presidential Candidate Gets Political Asylum In Britain

MINSK -- Former Belarusian presidential candidate Andrey Sannikau reportedly has received political asylum in Britain.

Sannikau's wife, Iryna Khalip, who is in Minsk, confirmed the news to RFE/RL but declined to provide more details.

Sannikau's sister, Iryna Bahdanava, said her brother is currently living in her apartment in London.

Sannikau was an opposition candidate in the 2010 Belarus presidential election, officially finishing second behind incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

He was reportedly singled out among protesters on election night by truncheon-wielding police, and suffered two broken legs as a result.

Sannikau was arrested after the election and sentenced to five years' imprisonment on charges of organizing mass disturbances.

He was pardoned and released in April

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

November 13, 2012

Bulhakau is staying abroad

MINSK -- The chief editor of an independent magazine in Belarus says he is currently abroad and fearing for his safety.

Valer Bulhakau, who works for ARCHE magazine, told RFE/RL on November 13 that he decided not to return to Belarus after a state-run television channel broadcast two long reports calling his recent book on World War II "potentially extremist."

Last month, Bulhakau was fined for "illegal business operations."

Bulhakau says the Financial Police launched investigations into his magazine's economic activities, which he says could be an attempt to legitimize his politically-motivated arrest.

Bulhakau did not reveal his current location

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

November 14, 2012

Belarus to Pay for Shadow Export of Oil by Returning Gasoline to Russia

Russia's Minister of Energy Alexander Novak says estimated losses of Russia from Belarus' re-export of oil under the guise of solvents are $1.5–2.5bln. Russian newspaper *Vedomosti* talked to Alexander Novak about the issue.

V: *Is it true that Russia demanded $1.5bln as compensation for shadow "solvents" export?*

AN: In accordance to different evaluations, the Russian budget losses total from $1.5bln to $2.5bln.

V: *Will Belarus ship oil products to Russia to reimburse the sum?*

Russia and Belarus inked the indicative balance on supplying oil and oil products. Now Belarus requires 23bln tones of Russian oil in 2013. This year the balance totals 21.5mln tones. It means they [Belarus] increased the offer of processing the oil in its oil refineries. Surely, Belarus does not need that much oil for internal use.

V: *Belarus' home consumption is 6mln tones.*

AN: Yes, they are obliged to return oil products to Russia under the conditions of the annual balances.

V: *Is there a set amount of these oil products?*

AN: Yes, now we're reconsidering these figures. They should be decided on by the end of November.

V: *On processing conditions?*

AN: It differs. We will suggest that both our companies who are the proprietors of the oil products and Belarusian companies — according to their share of ownership — should return the processed oil products and sell it in Russia. First of all, this is gasoline.

Source: *Naša Niva*

December 6, 2012

Belarusian Villagers Say Homes Destroyed Without Proper Compensation

Residents of a village in northeastern Belarus have complained they have had their homes bulldozed and burned to the ground without proper warning or adequate compensation from the authorities. Villagers in Paulovichy, in the Vitsebsk region of Belarus, say that the destruction of the village is connected to an upcoming visit to the region by Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Local officials, however, have said that the plan to raze the village has been in the works for a while and that the villagers had all been warned in advance and duly compensated

with apartments and moving expenses. According to local officials, the land will be used for leather-industry facilities. The villagers say that they were expecting to be moved out in the spring of 2013 but that regional officials only gave them two days to leave their property.

A resident of Paulovichy said that an appeal had been lodged in May with the authorities about the plans to destroy the village, but no response was forthcoming. "We complained that nothing had been built here for the last 20 years. We asked for official permission to register the plots of land if we have houses here," the resident said. The residents also said they contacted state television and other journalists, but didn't get a reply. They said they were concerned they would not be given proper compensation as their homes were not valued and the compensation will not include the value of their outbuildings and gardens. Now that the buildings have been destroyed, residents say they cannot prove the value of their property in court. . The village residents have said the urgency of the move was due to a planned visit to the region by Lukashenka. In recent weeks, the city of Vitsebsk has been spruced up, with fresh paint, roads relaid, and tiles replaced. When asked whether razing the village was connected to a possible Lukashenka visit, the official said, "Oh well, you know, the head of state goes wherever he wants and when he wants. Nobody is preparing for Lukashenka's arrival." Regional leaders in Belarus often spending money improving infrastructure in advance of presidential visits. An independent journalist in Vitsebsk published photos of the sudden renovations in the city. He was subsequently detained by the police after taking photos of asphalt being laid around a timber-processing plant. Lukashenka has backed a plan to expand the leather and fur industries in Vitsebsk. Officials said a Korean company was prepared to build or upgrade a tannery. The Belarusian president has said he wants to "diversify" the Belarusian economy in order to make the country less dependent on Western imports. Lukashenka has singled out Vitsebsk as an area that needs his attention.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

December 7, 2012

Lukashenka Signs Controversial Labor Decree

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has signed a controversial decree limiting rights of workers in the lumber sector.

According to the decree, the workers will be unable to quit their jobs without the permission of their employer.

Lukashenka first publicly spoke about his intention to introduce the regulation during his visit to the Barysaudrev lumber mill in the town of Barysau near Minsk last week.

He said then that workers who do try to leave their jobs would be sentenced to compulsory labor and returned to the production line.

The decree signed on December 7 made Lukashenka's proposal a law.

Labor unions in Belarus have said earlier this week that they plan to send a formal complaint to the International Labor Organization.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

December 7, 2012

***BATE Barysau* is third in group F of Champions' League, moves to Europa League's round of the last 32**

Despite a 0-2 home defeat to LOSC Lille (France) on 20 November, FC BATE Barysau secured the third spot in group F regardless of the result of the sixth day. match. As a result, FC BATE Barysau will move to the Europa League and will not compete for the Champions' League play-off spots.

FC BATE began the 2012/2013 Champions League group F campaign with two 3:1 victories against LOSC Lille of France away and Bayern München, Germany, at home. Other four games were lost by the Belarusian club. They were defeated twice by Valencia of Spain (0:3 at home and 2:4 away), once by Lille (0:2 at home) and once by Bayern (1:4 away).

Group F final standings are as follows:

1. Bayern Munchen 13 points (6 played, goal difference 15:7)
2. Valencia 13 points (6, 12:5)
3. BATE 6 points (6, 9:15)
4. LOSC Lille 3 points (6, 4:13).

CF Valencia and Bayern Munchen advanced to the Champions' League play-off, while FC BATE moved to the Europa League's round of the last 32. LOSC Lille finish its current season's European campaign.

BATE's *head coach* Viktar Hancharenka decided not to evaluate BATE's Champions League performance. "It is very difficult to draw any conclusions regarding our Champions League season right after the match. We need time and quiet atmosphere to analyze everything. Giving any estimations on the spur of the moment is not the right thing to do," Hancharenka underlined.

The Europa League last 32 round draw will be made in Nyon, Switzerland, on 20 December.

Despite four defeats at the end of the 2012/2013 Champions League season this one proved to be the best in BATE's history. The Belarusian club had not defeated any opponent in the previous seasons' of the Champions League group stages and had not jumped higher than the fourth spot.

Sources: *BelTA*

December 12, 2012

Rosatom vows timely construction of Belarusian nuclear station

The Russian company Rosatom will honor its obligations concerning the construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant and will do it for the price set by the intergovernmental agreement. The statement was made by Sergei Boyarkin, program director of the Russian state corporation for nuclear energy Rosatom, on 12 December, BelTA has learned.

"If Belarus decides to build a second nuclear power plant and as a sovereign country it can make the decision, if Belarus decides it needs the second nuclear power plant, Rosatom will take part in that tender," said Sergei Boyarkin.

The design AES-2006 has been chosen for Belarus' first nuclear power plant. The design is fully compliant with international norms and IAEA recommendations. Sergei Boyarkin specified that Rosatom is building energy units in Russia using the same design. The design has also been submitted for a tender in Czech Republic where the construction of a nuclear power plant is planned, too.

"It is a typical design of ours. Even before Fukushima it incorporated all the lessons taught by Chernobyl," remarked

the expert. "Working out our safety norms, we set out to allow the power plant to localize radioactive substances and rule out their emission into the environment if the station completely loses power and external heat absorber the way it happened at the nuclear station Fukushima 1," said the executive. Sergei Boyarkin assured that the design for Belarus had incorporated all the factors dubbed as "Fukushima lessons".

The nuclear compartment of the future Belarusian nuclear station aka the nuclear island will not differ from those created for the Leningrad station or the Baltic nuclear station but the general plan for the construction will be slightly different," said the expert. "The surrounding things relevant for external cooling systems and transport communications for every site require an individualized approach". Designers of the nuclear power plant have to take into account peculiarities of the territory, the temperature of the environment, snow and wind pressure, and the presence of subterranean water. "We adjust the typical design to specific technological conditions of the site," stressed Sergei Boyarkin.

The Belarusian nuclear power plant will have two power-generating units with the total capacity of up to 2,400MW (1,200MW each). It will be built at the Astraviec site in Hrodna Region. The first energy unit of the nuclear power plant is scheduled for commissioning in November 2018, with the second one scheduled for July 2020. The designed working lifespan of the Belarusian nuclear power plant is 60 years. The two energy units will be able to generate 17.74 billion kWh of electricity per annum. The electricity will cost $0.0421 per one kWh. The payback period of the project is estimated at 18.5 years.

Source: *BelTA*

December 18, 2012

Belarus Agrees to End Solvents Export Scheme

Belarus has agreed to end duty-free exports of gasoline and other oil products refined from Russian crude under the guise of "solvents," a scheme that reduces the customs duties it must pay to Russia, a source in the Belarusian government told the Prime news agency on Tuesday.

Belarus has agreed to make amendments to the Code of the Customs Union between the ex-Soviet republics of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan that will put an end to the practice, the source said.

"The amendments to the Customs Union Code were initiated by the Russian side," the source said.

Russia has repeatedly expressed concern about Belarus exporting oil products to Europe under the guise of solvents and thinners to evade additional tax payments to the Russian budget. Moscow has said the volume of crude supplied to Belarus next year would be tied to resolution of the issue.

According to Belarus' Statistical Agency Belstat, Belarus exported 244,000 tons of "solvents" in 2010, a figure that rose to 2.1 million tons in 2011 and to 2.9 million tons in the first half of 2012. Latvia was the main buyer, importing 1.5 million tons.

Source: RIA Novosti

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